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THE BIR BABAS OF BANARAS: AN ANALYSIS OF A FOLK DEITY IN NORTH INDIAN HINDUISM

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submitted to the Graduate School of the

University of Wisconsin-Madison in partial fulfillment of

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by

DIANE MARJORIE COCCARI

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THE BIR BABAS OF BANARAS: AN ANALYSIS OF A FOLK DEITY IN NORTH INDIAN HINDUISM

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DIANE MARJORIE COCCARI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Only the underlined words are given diacritical marks in the dissertation. The Hindi-Urdu or Sanskrit terms used most frequently are underlined with diacritics at their first use, and thereafter capitalized without these markings, e.g., Bir, Brahm, Sati for bīr, brahm, satī. Proper names are given without diacritics. The reader may refer to Appendix 1 for the Hindi-Urdu or Sanskrit pronunciation of these unmarked words. In the text sibilants are all represented by "sh" and aspirates by adding "h" to the consonant, with the exception of ca which is transliterated as "ch" and cha as "chh." A tilde is used for a nasalized vowel in the transliterations. Most of the terms used in the dissertation were encountered in Hindi-Urdu or Bhojpuri speaking contexts. The Hindi form is given with the omission of the final and occasional internal vowel a. In a Sanskritic context these vowels are retained. Occasionally a Bhojpuri alternative is given.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the University of Wisconsin´s College Year in India Program under the direction of Joseph W. Elder for my first dizzy introduction to India as an undergraduate, necessitating my return as a dissertator to find out what happened. The fieldwork for this study was financed in part by the American Institute of Indian Studies (September 1980 - November 1981), and the remaining period through the indirect support of the College Year in India Program (September 1980 - May 1982). I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, especially my advisor David M. Knipe for his encouragement of a project initially very distant from his own area of specialization, and A.K. Narain for acting as my advisor for the 1980-81 academic year at Banaras Hindu University. I would also like to thank my friends and fellow students in the Department of South Asian Studies for their support, fellowship and intellectual generosity.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the forbearance and cooperation of hundreds of individuals in the Varanasi area who allowed me to pry

into their lives and thoughts. As fieldwork assistant Om Prakash Sharma was invaluable, as was the instruction of my Hindi teacher Virendra Singh.

I am grateful to Ken Swift for his companionship, emotional and financial support, and technical assistance during the fieldwork period and thereafter. My daughter Leah has been an integral part of the writing period, making me a more efficient and contented worker. In closing, I would also like to thank my parents, Andrew and Arlene Coccari.

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to walk the streets, narrow _galīs_ and suburban lanes of Banaras without noticing the many small shrines which are the objects of ongoing ritual attention. Iconic and aniconic images rest on raised platforms, nestle in the roots of large holy trees, are set into the niches of boundary walls, or are housed in simple temple structures. Many of these images are familiar: the ubiquitous _liṅgas_ of Shiva, representations of Ganesh, Hanuman, Bhairava, Durga, Kali, Sitala Mata, the recently popular Santoshi Ma. There are goddesses with unfamiliar names (Sambho Mai, Saiyari Mai), memorials to ascetics ("Babas"), and other shrines dedicated to the memory or power of the human dead: the _satīs_, _bīrs_, and _brahms_. The Birs--also called "Bir Babas"--appear to be the most numerous among these. The city of Banaras contains hundreds of Bir Baba temples and shrines, many of which show signs of recent construction or repair. Having been alerted to the existence of these shrines and familiar with the range of their iconography, one suddenly sees them everywhere. Extending the search to rural areas around the city, one finds that there is hardly a village which does not

contain a Bir that is a focal community shrine. What do we make of these Bir Baba temples, their number and obvious attraction for city and village residents? Who are the Bir Babas? Why do they have so many iconographic forms? How are they worshipped and who are their worshippers? What is their place in the profuse and multi-faceted pantheon of Varanasi´s deities?

Indian scholarship has provided us with the broad context for the study of the phenomenon of Bir worship, but has done little to add to our knowledge of specific cults. Moti Chandra and V.S. Agrawal find sufficient explanation of the Birs in their kinship with ancient Indian yakṣas.[1] In his Ancient Indian Folk Cults, Agrawal developed the theory that the Yaksha cult survives today in the worship of "Bir-Barahm," terms he attempts to prove synonymous with "Yaksha."[2] He views the contemporary cult as a direct descendent of "Yaksha-Dharma," and identifies specific Banaras Birs with historical Yakshas based on their similar sounding names.[3] Yet Agrawal´s own description of his research reveals his lack of familiarity with the folklore and worship of the contemporary deities, and therefore the impressionistic and preemptive nature of his conclusions. Agrawal´s research on these "Bir-Barahm" consisted of several walks to Bir shrines located within

the walls of Banaras Hindu University campus, and conversations with friends and scholars from other districts in Uttar Pradesh and neighboring states about this existence of Birs or Brahms in their areas. He admits that the results of his "miniature folklore survey" required augmentation with further research, yet never questioned his assumption that they could most profitably be interpreted "in the light of ancient Yaksha worship."[4] What Agrawal suggested as the beginnings of an inquiry, others have accepted as adequate explanation: Birs are the Yakshas of today. Other writers since have echoed Agrawal´s basic assumption.[5]

Unfortunately the "Yaksha" explanation of the Bir cult obscures as much as it illuminates. If we are looking only to identify historic Yakshas in the names of contemporary Birs, we have diminished the importance of the participants´ perceptions their living tradition. Bir worshippers identify their deities as the powerful and heroic dead, and the majority of the Banaras city shrines were probably established within the last few decades. This is not to say that Bir-type deities were not among those described as Yakshas in the literature. Ram Nath Misra, in his Yaksha Cult and Iconography, even goes so far as to state that the[6]

> birth-stories of Yakshas seem to illustrate that ancestor-worship had its unmistakable bearing on the Yaksha cult. It will be speculative, no doubt, but it is quite possible that the Yaksha pantheon may have evolved as a result of deification of various departed heroes.

Yet anyone familiar with the literature on Yakshas is aware of the incredible range of phenomena identified by this rubric. In a sense "Yaksha" is a catchall for a whole range of folk deities encountered by the writers of the Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali texts. Our record of the Yaksha documents the attempts of practitioners of more orthodox religions to come to grips with, incorporate, or supersede various ´folk´ cults of obvious vitality, and we must recognize this point of view when we look to the material for information about the ancient deities. Modern scholarship has contributed to this process of identifying as "Yaksha" every evidence of ancient folk religion. Yakshas are said to be celestial/terrestrial, mortal/immortal, human/ divine. They are deities of hills, mountains, lakes, rivers, tanks, caves, forests, trees, houses, gates and shrines. They are benevolent/malevolent/ambivalent, radiantly beautiful or monstrously grotesque. At different times Yakshas are equated with or distinguished from Nagas, Gandharvas, Devas, Devatas, Guhyakas, Rakshasas, Apsaras, Pishachas, Bhutas, etc.[7]

To say that Birs are Yakshas is in a sense tautological: all kinds of folk deities are Yakshas, so Birs must be Yakshas. We are no closer to distinguishing these cults, their origins and originators. It is my feeling that we may profit as much by reversing the direction of our inquiry: careful study of contemporary cults--new expressions of timeless processes--may give us invaluable insights into what evidence we have of the ancient cults.

Ignored or briefly summarized in texts on Classical Hinduism, one may find references to Birs and other "godlings" in Western works on folk religion, such as William Crooke´s Religion and Folklore of Northern India.[8] Crooke´s writings on North Indian folk religion continue to be consulted as basic texts on the subject--much like the writings of Elmore or Whitehead for South India[9]--but share with the latter its idiosyncrasies, problems and limitations. A veritable wealth of material, it suffers from the attempt to make sense of a tremendous range of information often reported in a superficial and anecdotal manner by British government servants on tour, European churchmen, or other foreign residents of India. Despite the interest of these writers in the manifestations of religious life encountered among rural people, at best it is viewed as

primitive and superstitious. The rural deities are often characterized as "demons," their priests "sorcerers," and their cults "devil worship." These cults had yet to be studied within their various contexts (village, caste, ethnic, regional, etc.) or comparatively across the different regions of India. What might be called the "emic" point of view is never systematically represented.[10]

It is generally recognized that "aboriginal" peoples in India have as a major component of their religious life the worship of tribal ancestors, leaders, heroes and other powerful dead.[11] It is only very recently that the extent and vitality of Hindu worship of the "deified dead" has been widely publicized. Studies in both art history and folklore have contributed to our knowledge of these cults. The need to understand and contextualize the visual form of Bir images has resulted in at least one important study of Bir worship. W.G. Archer's detailed account of the cult of Bir Kuar in western Bihar is the only study of its kind in North India, and will be discussed at length in a later part of this dissertation.[12] Recent works on "hero" or "memorial stones" also offer us valuable historical and comparative material.[13] Studies in South Asian folklore are perhaps the primary source of new

data. Many of the--especially epic--traditions studied involve the deification of caste or tribal heroes and the worship of these heroes, and we are therefore offered certain details of the religious and cultic contexts of these traditions.[14] Yet this information is subordinate to the purpose of contextualizing the oral epic and its performance, and in some cases is extremely minimal. In his recent article in The History of Religions,[15] Stuart Blackburn draws upon many of the above-mentioned studies to demonstrate how the cults of the deified dead in India share the same funerary base as more orthodox religious expressions. Blackburn's is a valuable and timely statement of the fundamental importance of these cults in the Indian religious traditions (including, although not treated, Buddhism and Islam). Blackburn's characterization of these traditions draws heavily on material from the south of India where the various cults of the deified dead show a degree of elaboration not often found in the North among the Hindu population. The oral performance of a deity's story--involving music, singing, dance, and the possession of participants by the narrative's heroes--is common in these southern cults. Yet we must recognize that the worship of the deified dead also occurs in a less developed, centralized and particularized manner.

In the region of North India covered by this study, worship of the deified dead is no less ubiquitous, but rarely is expressed in the manner Blackburn describes. In view of this, we speak of the ´cult´ of these deities in a much looser sense, to mean the phenomenon of their worship taken together.

The work of Günther-Dietz Sontheimer in western India is also extremely important in this area.[16] Sontheimer combines the use of folkloric, historical, ethnographic and archaeological data to illuminate the cults of the major regional deities of Maharashtra. These he finds to have originated as the deities of pastoralists (some as deified heroes) before becoming the gods of all castes. Sontheimer´s work helps to balance the impression--made study and the material used by Blackburn--that these cults primarily involve the "untimely" dead. Sontheimer is careful to point out that these figures may also be leaders, ancestors, and other honored and respected dead, something perhaps more common in areas where proper ancestor worship is observed. In addition, Sontheimer´s documentation of a tradition of hero worship among pastoralists is extremely important for the latter portion of this study.

As we have indicated by this brief overview,

contemporary studies of the worship of the deified dead are lacking for large areas of North India, as are those which treat these cults as the primary focus of inquiry. We will therefore describe to the fullest possible extent the phenomenon of Bir worship in the city of Varanasi and the surrounding region, and will utilize ethnographic, historical, folkloric, and other material in pursuit of this primary objective. The point of departure is the city of Banaras or Varanasi (used interchangeably in this work), where Bir Baba shrines are visible in almost every neighborhood. But the city itself runs rather abruptly into village areas, and is in many ways inextricably linked with the surrounding region. The urban Birs can only be properly understood with reference to their country brothers, and we will therefore shift focus many times from the city to countryside and back. As part of our examination of the Birs, we will touch upon the traditions of other related figures in order to provide a more balanced picture of worship of the deified dead in this area, and lastly will examine a more articulated Bir tradition, that of the Ahir or Cowherd caste.

The expressions "Banaras area" or the "Banaras region" are used repeatedly. By the former is meant the rural area within ten miles or so of the city, and the

latter the larger region which forms the Western Bhojpuri speaking area of western Uttar Pradesh, but which also includes parts of eastern Bihar. I have found that state boundaries mean little when people conceive of their region and the system of pilgrimage sites contained therein. When the name "Kashi" is used in place of "Banaras" or "Varanasi," it conveys the idea of the ancient and timeless city.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Moti Chandra, Kāśī kā Itihās (Bombay: Hindi Granth Ratnakar, 1962), pp. 32-38. Vasudeva S. Agrawal, Ancient Indian Folk Cults (Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1970), pp. 185-6. Agrawal also published other individual articles on the topic, such as "Bir-Barahm," Ānand Vārtā, 28, No. 2 (1981), 144-156 [in Hindi], etc.

Interestingly, Kubernath Sukul disagrees with this hypothesis. He understands Birs to have a distinct origin, and knows the etiology of Brahm from Brahm Rakshas, the ghost or deified ghost of a Brahman. Vārānasī Vaibhav (Patna: Bihar Rastrabhasa Parisad, 1977), 263-65.

2 Agrawal, Ancient, pp. 185-6.

3 Agrawal, Ancient, p. 188.

4 Agrawal, Ancient, p. 195.

5 Paramesvarilal Gupta, "Kāśī ke Bīr," Kaśi Ank (Uttar Pradesh Public Liaison Department), II, No. 10-11 (April-May 1983), 88-90 [in Hindi].

6 Ram Nath Misra, Yaksha Cult and Iconography (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981), p. 147.

7 See also Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Yakṣas, 2nd. ed. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1980).

8 William Crooke, The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India 2 vols. (London: A. Constable, 1896; rpt. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978); Religion and Folklore of Northern India (London: Oxford University Press, 1926; rpt. New Delhi, 1972).

9 Henry Whitehead, The Village Gods of South India (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1921; rpt. New Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1976); Wilber Theodore Elmore, Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism (1915; rpt. Madras, 1925).

10 One of the better early descriptions of "demon worship in Northern India" was written by Alexander Cunningham, "Report of a Tour in the Central Provinces and Lower Gangetic Doab in 1881-82," Archaeological Survey of India (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1969), XVII, 139-166. See also plate 34.

11 Verrier Elwin, The Religion of an Indian Tribe (London: Oxford University Press, 1955); and the work of Fraser, Furer-Haimendorf, Koppers and many others.

12 W.G. Archer, The Vertical Man: A Study in Primitive Indian Sculpture (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1947). See Parts 3.1 and 3.3 of this dissertation.

Due to her familiarity with the range of iconographic forms of the "Vira" throughout the Subcontinent, Pupul Jayakar´s more recent study of the "ritual arts of rural India" has offered a brief but satisfying general overview of the phenomenon. The Earthen Drum: An Introduction to the Ritual Arts of Rural India (New Delhi: National Museum, 1980).

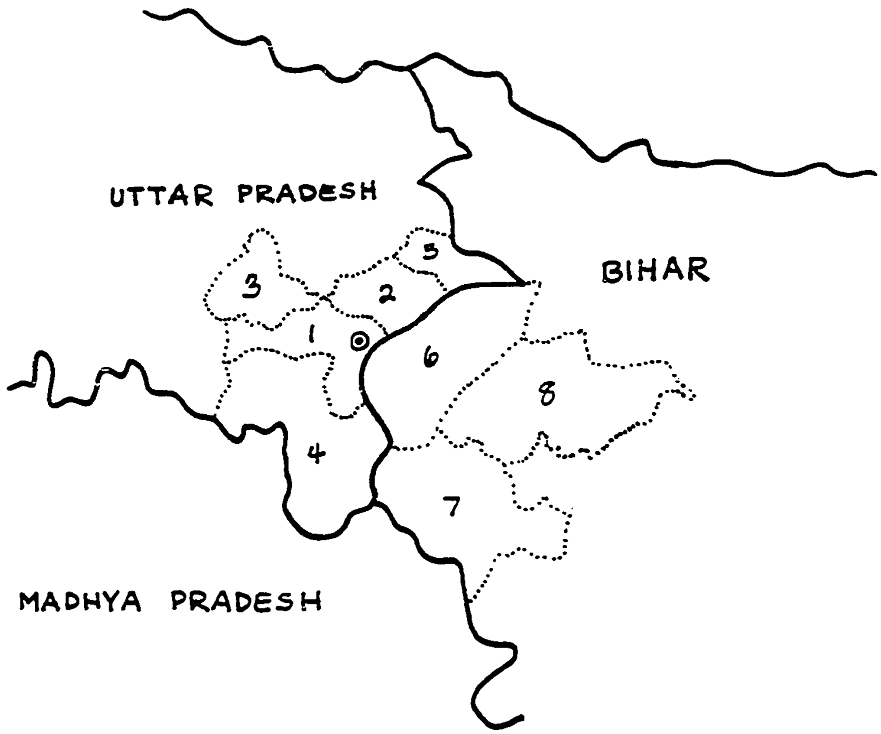
13 S. Settar and Günther D. Sontheimer, Memorial Stones: A Study of their Origin, Significance and Variety (Dharwad: Institute of Indian Art History; New Delhi: South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, 1982); Fischer Eberhard and Haku Shah, Vetra ne Khamba--Memorials for the Dead (Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vidyapith, 1973).

14 See Brenda E.F. Beck, The Three Twins: The Telling of a South Indian Folk Epic (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Stuart Blackburn, "Oral Performance: Narrative and Ritual in a Tamil Folk Tradition," Journal of American Folklore, 94 (1981), 207-27; Komal Kothari, "Performers, Gods, and Heroes in the Folk Epics of Rajasthan" in The Oral Epic in India, ed. Stuart Blackburn and Susan S. Wadley, forthcoming; K.K.N. Kurup, The Cult of Teyyam and Hero Worship (Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1973); Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Epics and Ideologies: Six Telugu Folk Epics," in Another Harmony: Essays in Indian Folklore, ed. Stuart Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan, (California: University of California Press, forthcoming). Gene H. Roghair, The Epic of Palnāḍu: A Study and Translation of the Palnāṭi Vīrula Katha (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

15
Stuart H. Blackburn, "Death and Deification: Folk Cults in Hinduism," History of Religions, 24, No. 3 (Feb. 1985), 255-274.

16
Günther D. Sontheimer, Birobā, Mhaskobā und Khaṇḍobā: Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von Pastoralen Gottheiten in Mahārāṣtra (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976); with L.S. Leshnik, Pastoralists and Nomads in South Asia (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975); "Some Incidents in the History of the God Khandoba," Asie du Sud: Traditions et Changements Proceedings of the 6th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, July 8-13, 1978 (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1978); "Prehistoric Background to Pastoralism in the Southern Deccan in the Light of Oral Traditions and Cults of Some Pastoral Communities," Anthropos, 75 (1980), 163-184; "Hero and Satī-stones of Maharashtra," in Settar and Sontheimer, Memorial Stones, 261-81; "Mallāri/Khaṇḍobā Myth as Reflected in Folk Art and Ritual," Anthropos, 79 (1984), 155-170; "The Power of Valour and Sacrifice: Memorials of Heroes, Satis, and Ancestors in Maharashtra," typescript, n.d.

Map 1. "The Banaras Region"



⊙ the city of Varanasi

<u>Uttar Pradesh districts indicated</u>

1 Varanasi
2 Ghazipur
3 Jaunpur
4 Mirzapur
5 Ballia

<u>Bihar districts indicated</u>

6 Shahabad
7 Palnau
8 Gaya

PART 1

THE BIR BABAS OF BANARAS: IDENTITY AND FUNCTION

1.1 Ghost, Hero, Ascetic: Who are the Bir Babas?

"Bīr" is the pronunciation in various Hindi dialects of the Sanskrit noun vīra, a "brave, eminent man, hero or chief," one who possesses vīrya: "manliness or manly vigour, valour, strength, power, energy, virility."[1] "Bābā" is a term of endearment or respect for a male family member--a son, husband, father, paternal grandfather--or of deference for an ascetic or very old man.[2] The use of "Baba" as an expression of closeness and respect for a person is easily extended to a venerable male deity with whom the worshipper has a intimate relationship. Many "small" gods are addressed as "Baba," but so too are some representatives of major pan-Indian gods. One example is Kashi's famous Vishveshvara (Shiva), who is called by many "Baba Vishvanath."[3] An initial, superficial gloss of "Bir Baba," therefore, conveys the sense of a personal deity of heroic mien.

Conversations with neighbors, caretakers, and worshippers of 43 Bir temples and shrines in the city of

Varanasi and surrounding villages from September 1980 - May 1982 revealed the following as to the identity of the Bir Babas.

Some Banaras residents refuse to allow that Birs have any ´real´ existence outside the active imaginations of a superstitious lower class. But for those who recognize their existence, the most critical distinction in the Birs´ ontological status involves their classification as "ghosts/spirits" (bhūt-pret) or "deities" (devatā). One segment of people interviewed maintained that Birs were beings of the pret yoni, the "birth as a ghost," a painfully liminal condition which is neither of the gods, ancestors, or man. These "ghosts" or "spirits" (most frequently identified by the compound bhūt-pret which makes no distinction in meaning between the two terms) suffered violent, unnatural, premature or "untimely deaths" (akāl mṛtyu) which rendered them unqualified for the normal rites of death, or for whom these rites were inadequate to advance them to the world of the ancestors (pitṛ lok) and beyond.[4] Angry, jealous, and seething with unfulfilled desires, the only recourse of the ghost is to harass or otherwise persuade the living to give them the desired attention. A ghost may appear to an individual in a vision or a dream, cause illness and other misfortune, or take active

possession. Often it is a family member who is contacted by a spirit, or it might be an enemy of the ghost, or an unrelated person who had the bad luck to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. People bothered in this way may seek the help of a professional exorcist (ojhā) to remove or transfer the spirit to another individual or location, or perform rituals of appeasement, including the creation of a shrine (sthān) to "quiet" (śānti karnā) the spirit. A ghost that is given a shrine is hopefully satisfied, will make no further demands, and lapse into an inactive state. It may periodically flare up in anger if neglected, or be ritually manipulated by one party against another.

Examples among the Banaras Birs of the kind of death described above are Tar Bir, a Pasi--Toddy Tapper-who fell from a palm tree; Bhoju Bir, a Teli--Oil Presser--who slipped into a vat of oil; Kalu Bir, a Khatik--Vegetable Seller--who was shot by British soldiers; Nangan Bir, a Bhar--an aboriginal ´caste´--who drowned himself because he could not marry his high caste beloved; Chhatariya Bir, an Ahir--Cowherd--who was sacrificed in the foundation of a building; and Bachau Bir, an Ahir who was killed in a fight with local enemies. The most repeated name for a Bir in Banaras is Daitra Bir: a dait or daitya in this case another name

for a ghost. This type of explanation of the Birs' identity is entirely logical, but it must be understood to be pejorative. Those who identify Birs as ghosts regard them as occasionally troublesome yet ultimately minor beings of little or no significance. More than one individual said that, "All you have to do is to fall out of a tree to become a Bir." This type of answer was indicative of the individual's non-belief and non-participation in Bir worship.

The people who worship the Birs consider them gods or deities ("ham devatā mānte hain." "We believe they are deities.") and not mere ghosts. The Bir is distinguished from lesser spirits because he is their "master" (mālik) who controls the 'supernatural' activity within his particular domain. Birs are believed to be particularly "awake" (jāgta hai) among the local gods, and active in the fulfillment of human desires. Their power is generated by a violent and tragic death, and is channeled and transformed by the ritual establishment of a shrine. This power may then be enhanced by worship, especially if there was something in the character and conduct of the deceased and his relationship with the living that would dispose him to posthumous beneficence. Further, Bir worshippers take the "vīra" part of the deity's description quite literally. The greatest

percentage of those interviewed explained that the Birs were heroic "martyrs" (*śahīd*) who sacrificed their lives in defense of family, friends, caste group, village or religion. "Anyone who dies on the battlefield is a Bir" was a repeated refrain. Many of the Banaras Birs were reported to have died at the time of the Mahabharata war, in battles among regional, historical chieftains, fighting the Muslim armies of Aurangzeb or the English army of the Raj, or in more recent altercations with local enemies. This explanation is consistent in one sense with meaning of *akāl mṛtyu*, for the hero dies violently in his prime and may continue to haunt the site of his death; but the qualities of bravery and self-sacrifice are underscored, setting the Bir apart from the ordinary run of *bhūt-pret*. It is even said by some that the hero/martyr attains a special realm after death, called *bīr gati* or the "hero's heaven." While many of the Bir stories continue to be flavored by the *bhūt-pret* complex or a more archaic and local brand of heroism, an attempt is made to relate these events to wider and more universal values. Even if the circumstances surrounding the death of a Bir do not at first glance appear particularly 'heroic,' the teller will expand upon the exceptional qualities of the individual or emphasize the fact that the hero was tricked, out-

numbered, or otherwise overcome by fate in order to be killed. The Bir's physical strength and size, leadership ability, bravery, fighting and wrestling prowess, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and devotion to God will be extolled. The word sthān continues to be used for the shrines of these heroes, but the descriptive terms yādgār (memorial) and samādhi (tomb, memorial) are heard as often. These latter expressions dignify the dead--in a way that the designation sthān might fail to--with a suggestion of the extraordinary and memorable deeds or character of the hero.

There is yet another sense in which the Bir Babas are considered to be Viras. Some of those interviewed are of the opinion that the Birs are deceased sādhus (mendicants) or yogīs (ascetics). The shrines of these ascetics are therefore samādhis or tombs containing the bodies of the deceased, memorials to their example and teachings, and the sites of their lingering presence and power. In Banaras there are many such small, neighborhood samādhis erected in honor of ascetics who were associated with local inhabitants in some special way. For many of the patrons of these shrines, there is no relationship or similarity between the figure said to be entombed in their particular samādhi and the various Bir temples throughout the city. Some insist that the

memorialized ascetics are Brahmans, demonstrating the social distance between these figures and the Bir cult which they regard as illegitimate, low-caste and rustic. Yet there are other shrines where oral traditions describe composite figures possessing characteristics of both Sadhu and Bir. This conflation of identities is not uncommon, and is understandable in view of the fluidity of the legends of charismatic figures and the functional similarities among their cults. There are many congruencies between the two types of figures which would tend to draw them together in people´s minds. Memorialized Birs and Sadhus are both addressed as "Baba." Their shrines--containing a mound or "martial ascetic" image--may be close to identical.[5] In each case the figures are considered to be ´present´ at the shrine location,[6] and are petitioned by worshippers for the fulfillment of desires and relief from illness, misfortune, and infertility. Both types of shrines are identified with particular neighborhoods or social groups and are publicly celebrated by these patrons in similar ways.

On other levels, too, ascetics and martial heroes have much in common. The figure of the warrior-ascetic was made famous by the Dasanami Nagas who were reputed to take up arms in defense of their sect.[7] Spiritual

descendents of these Sadhus continue to uphold their reputation for fierceness with martial displays at the periodic religious fairs which occur in different locations in North India. One such procession took place in Banaras in 1982, in which naked and ash-smeared Nagas, wielding spears, swords, shields and lāṭhī (fighting staffs), exhibited their skill in mock battles.

Related to this phenomenon is the ascetic who becomes physically powerful as a result of his spiritual practice (sādhana) or austerities (tapas). It is a common sight in modern India to see ascetics demonstrating the degree of their spiritual attainment by pulling trucks, breaking chains with bare hands, and encouraging elephants to walk on their chests. Unusual physical strength and bravery are counted among the supernatural powers (siddhis) acquired through yogic practice, reinforcing again this association between strength, heroism and asceticism. Another expression of this theme occurs in "left-handed" Tantric ritual. The adept who is qualified by his preparation, physical attributes, and physic energy to use the actual polluting and dangerous substances (the "five M's" or pāñcamakāra) in the cakrapūjā ritual is called a "Hero" or Vira.[8] Several Bir Babas in the city were said to

have attained "perfection" (<u>siddh ho gayā</u>) through the practice of this <u>vīra-sādhana</u>.

The relationship between heroism and spiritual qualities or practice also works in the other direction. As ascetics may be warriors and heroes, so too are lay heroes assumed by some to possess yogic attainments or saintly characters. Great heroes are believed to undergo certain physical transformations that are parallel in many ways to the kinds of transformations that occur in the body of a Yogi. People speak in awe of a Bir's strength and size (no other man can even lift his staff or put on his armor), the amount he can eat or the great distances he can leap, as though these and other qualities were somehow miraculous and beyond the reach of ordinary men. Many Birs are said to be <u>pahalwān</u>, a descriptive term which not only means "wrestler," but implies disciplined spiritual attainment as well. Further evidence is the size of the hero's <u>kalejā</u>, an organ in which accumulates the essence of his strength, bravery and skill, and which grows commensurate to the prowess of its owner. One English-speaking informant used the word "saint" to describe a Bir Baba she was told was once a living Ahir hero.[9] Other informants characterized all Birs as having necessary spiritual qualities--great devotion to God (Bhagwan) or

having a "particle" (_anś_) of God in their being--in order to be enshrined and honored by future generations.[10] In all this there is an underlying assumption that physical and spiritual attainment occurs simultaneously, that the development of one necessarily implies the development of the other.

It is interesting that the Perso-Arabic word _śahīd_ is frequently used to describe the Bir Babas. Low caste Hindus (and quasi-Hindus) living in the countryside have for centuries participated in the worship of Muslim "warriors" (_ġāzī_), "martyrs" (_śahīd_) and Sufi "saints" and religious teachers (_pīr_) along with other regional or village deities. The rural ´Hindu´ worldview treats both Islamic and non-Islamic deified dead in a consistent manner; in fact, the Islamic figures are often described as "Muslim Deities" (_musalmānī devatā_). The nature of the oral traditions of these Islamic figures and their tomb-centered worship parallels the cult of the Birs in many ways, and there is little doubt that there has been a great deal of interaction among these traditions.[11] The conflation of hero-ascetic-saint has its analogue in the case of the Islamic dead. Muslim _ġāzī_ and _śahīd_ are also conflated with _pīr_ in the popular imagination. As is true for the Hindu figures, the lines--in this case between the active and passive

modes of disseminating Islam--are not so easily drawn, as demonstrated by the "warrior sufis" described by Eaton.[12] One even encounters in Banaras the homologization of Bir and Pir, aided even further by the homophony of their titles. One North Indian example of this is the epic of Guga, a legendary Rajput hero worshipped by Hindus as Guga Chauhan or Guga Bir, and by Muslims as Zahir Pir.[13]

The predominant impression conveyed by informant explanation is that the Birs are powerful and lingering dead, be they ghosts, martyred heroes or ascetics. We will return many times to these various conceptions of the Birs in the following pages, beginning with a description of their images and shrines.

NOTES

1.1 GHOST, HERO, ASCETIC: WHO ARE THE BIR BABAS?

1 Monier Monier-Williams, Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Oxford, 1899; rpt. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), p. 100?.

2 Ram Chandra Varma, ed., Mānak Hindī Kośa, V (Prayāg: Hindī Sahitya Sammelan, 1966), 114, and supported by fieldwork.

3 Virendra Singh first pointed this out to me.

4 The Hindu law books equivocate on the subject of untimely death and the performance of śrāddha. According to the Yājñavalkya Smṛti, if one commits suicide or dies from drowning, "lightning, and from animals that have sharp fangs ... the water and pinda ... offered to such people ... do not reach them and perish in mid air." But if one dies inadvertently by these means, the rituals may be observed [Pandurang Vaman Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, IV (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973), 301]. Again, " ... sraddha should be performed on the 14th tithi of the dark half of Bhādrapada for those who met a violent death by poisoning or fire or were killed by animals having fangs or horns or who committed suicide." [Kane, History, IV, 370, note 838b.] In some cases of violent death (such as suicide), a ritual called the Narayanbali may be performed, after which śrāddha may be offered [quoted from Manu V. 89-90 in Kane, History, IV, 302, 525]. The paṇḍās (pilgrimage temple priests) of the temple of Pishach Mochan in Banaras cited the Narayanbali as well as Tripindi Sraddh (the specialty of this temple) as two rituals which effect the transformation of pret into pitṛ (ancestor), then eligible for the normal śrāddha rites. In spite of these and other ritual means (perhaps certain "expiation rituals" (prāyaścitas), it seems that many ghosts seem to ´slip through the cracks,´ and must be dealt with by other means. One must assume that those groups for whom orthodox śrāddha is not normative will also have a system of rites to deal with normal death as well as for

unnatural, violent or premature death.

5 See Part 1.2 below.

6 The range of usage of the term samādhi conveys something of the nature of the ´presence´ of an entombed ascetic. It is often said that a particular Yogi will announce his intention to "take samādhi" (samādhi lenā) for a specified number of days in a carefully prepared, airless tomb (as did one "Pilot Baba" in Banaras in December of 1981). The adept then theoretically utilizes his yogic skill to drastically retard bodily functions, obviating the need for sustenance and air for the duration of the entombment. The body will appear cold and lifeless, yet the germ of life remains in the highest cakra at the top of the skull. It is said that during this time, the individual may be seen at other locations as he is able to move about freely and perform other ´miracles´ while in this state. Whatever one thinks of the publicity-seeking aspects of this practice, it is understood as a part of a sādhana that eventually leads to the attainment of samādhi, the ultimate goal or stage of spiritual attainment, after which the being of the Yogi is permanently transmuted or transformed. Sometimes an ageing adept will state his intention to "take samādhi" to signal his departure from this life in his present body: he wills his death/release/immortality by this culminating yogic act. For any or all of these reasons, an ascetic buried in his samādhi/tomb is understood to be ´present´ either in an immortal body or as a liberated, disembodied consciousness hovering about the shrine. Deceased sectarian Guru figures, in particular, are addressed, attended, and worshipped as though they are living and perhaps even more capable of intercession in the lives and spiritual progress of their followers. At the most popular level, the memorialized Yogi is viewed as a wakeful presence in much the same way as the other deified figures of this study, characterized by an imminence and responsiveness to human needs and concerns.

7 See Jadunath Sarkar, A History of the Dashnami Naga Sanyasis (Allahabad: P.A. Mahanirvani, 1950); G.S. Ghurye, Gods and Men (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1962); Kevin McConeghey, "The History, Organization, and Practices of Dasnami Naga Sadhus," Fieldwork Project for University of Wisconsin´s College Year in India Program, Varanasi, 1980.

8 See Agehananda Bharati, _The Tantric Tradition_ (Rider & Co., 1965; rpt. New York: Doubleday, 1970).

9 Personal interview at Banaras Hindu University´s Daitra Bir shrine, August 4, 1981.

10 Personal interview with Manna Lal Yadav, March 17, 1981.

11 See "Muslim Deities," Part 2.3 below.

12 Richard Maxwell Eaton, _Sufis of Bijapur 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India_ (New Jeresy: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 33.

13 See Elwyn C. Lapoint, "The Epic of Guga: A North Indian Oral Tradition," in _American Studies in the Anthropology of India_, ed. Sylvia Vatuk (Delhi: Manohar, 1978), 281-308; and R.C. Temple, "The Legend of Guru Gugga," in _The Legends of the Panjab_, (1884; rpt. Punjab: Language Department, 1962), I, 121-209.

1.2 The Bir Image and Shrine

The Bir shrine is most frequently identified as a sthān (Hindi) or asthān (Bhojpuri) from the Sanskrit sthāna, a "place, spot, locality, abode, dwelling, house, site."[1] It might also be called a bhūt-asthān, deva-asthān, or bīr-asthān, which clarifies the type of being believed to reside there. For the Bir worshipper the word sthān alone implies a locale of a deity or a holy place. Others use the more elevated mandir ("temple") or samādhi ("tomb") as well as yādgār ("memorial").

The most common representation of the Birs found in the villages and rural areas surrounding Varanasi is aniconic: a low mound or taller, rounded cone (piṇḍ, stūp, thūhā) set on top of a raised platform (caurā, cautarā, cabūtarā; see figures 1 and 2). The terms given for the elevated portion of the shrine are descriptive of the image's shape, a piṇḍ being a "lump, ball, round mass"[2] and stūp and thūhā which derive from the Sanskrit stūpa. Informants generally report the original form of a given image before remodeling to be a small mound of packed mud or clay, examples of which are still encountered in rural areas. This mound-like or

conical ´image´ also represents other deified dead such as the Sati and Brahm. The samādhis of some ascetics are also marked by a similar mound, especially those of the Nath Sadhus.[3] One must assume that the tradition of raising a mound over the remains or relics of the dead is a very ancient one on the Indian subcontinent, and that the Buddhist caitya or stūpa are expressions of this widespread funerary practice.

The development of the permanent bīr-asthān from clay mound is visually obvious in most cases, but one is still at a loss to explain the taller, nosecone-like images. It has been suggested to me by Günther Sontheimer that these images resemble the anthills or termite mounds found in many areas of India.[4] Among the mythological associations of the anthill is its connection with snakes and other chthonic beings, ghosts, and the realm of the dead.[5] The fieldwork of David Knipe in the town of Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, supports this theoretical relationship between the anthill, the conical image and the spirits of the "untimely" dead. The temple of Virabhadra in Rajahmundry was built around a collection of anthills said to contain cobras and female spirits. Also in the temple are placed vibhūti paṇḍu, small, conical "ash fruits" which represent the untimely dead. The shape of

these small "ash fruits" is identical to the conical shrine of the deified dead described above. Worship of the vibhūti paṇḍu is normally a family or household cult. These small images, like the anthill, are said to "grow" each year as they are worshipped.[6] The taller conical images remind one also of monolithic representations of guardian deities, such as that of the Telugu guardian Pota Raju pictured in the work of Gene Roghair.[7] In Orissa and parts of Bihar, wooden posts are used to represent the deified dead and other village deities.[8] A few of the Banaras Bir images have this post-like shape. Some of these latter symbols look deceptively like Shiva liṅgas, but the circular yoni is not present and the two image types are rarely confused.

An ´improved´ mound-image may be constructed of white-washed clay over brick, or of more permanent materials such as stone or cement. Several Banaras images are covered with copper or brass. A small niche is set in the front surface, serving as an opening in which offerings are placed. This niche may also be understood as a small platform where the soul or spirit of the deceased--to whom the shrine is dedicated--may alight. A pit for fire oblations (havan kuṇḍ) and an iron trident may be found at the site, along with other

permanent offerings such as red flags tied on bamboo poles and suspended brass bells. The Bir Baba shrine may stand in the open or is housed in a simple three or four-walled temple structure. The shrine is often associated with a particular sacred tree (pīpal, bel or nīm).

Despite its aniconic form, devotees worship the Bir Baba image as they would any other approachable Hindu mūrti. A worshipper will press the bottom of the post or mound as though touching or massaging the feet of the Bir, and drape the image with cloth or garlands. A brass or silver "mask" (cehara) may be affixed to the front of the aniconic form, effecting its transformation to iconic image (figures 3 and 4). These masks are similar to the one attached to the rough stone ´image´ of Kal Bhairava in the main Banaras temple, a face sporting a large moustache typical of the South Asian warrior-hero.

A second type of aniconic bīr sthān--most often encountered outside the denser portions of the city under the large old trees that grace village fields and lanes--may be called the ´empty´ shrine (figure 5). Its association with trees is often underscored by the actual name of the Bir: Tar Bir ("Palm Tree Bir"), Belawa Bir ("Bel Tree Bir") and Pipala Bir ("Pepal Tree

Bir"). These simple structures exist in a range of styles and sizes, but all are open on one side to reveal an inner space void of an image. The enclosure may be filled with the offerings of worshippers, and the structure itself garlanded with flowers. These small shrines house the soul or spirit the Bir and provide space for offerings rather than represent his human form. The proliferation of images and small shrines among the roots of sacred trees can be viewed as an expression of the underlying cultural conviction that trees themselves are venerable or are the proper abode of ´godlings´ and spirits (yakṣas, yakṣīs, daityas, etc.) to whom these shrines are built to honor and placate. I believe that this type of Bir shrine is often a re-naming of an older presence long associated with a particular tree, though popular explanation will have it that a given shrine was established in memory of a person who fell out of a tree and died, hence its location under that tree.

One other type of aniconic Bir image is worthy of note. The Banaras area contains at least two Bir Baba images which are large old millstones or grindstones (kolhū), both named Kolhua Bir. A ring-shaped stone is found in Vinayaka Colony, and a grooved cylinder embedded in cement in a rudimentary ´temple´ in

Saraynandan Village (figure 6). The grindstone is used in fertility rites (the sexual symbolism is obvious) and divination,[9] but the referent in this case is uncertain. The neighbors of the shrines tell stories of the stones moving under their own power or resisting being moved by the strongest men, proof of the special power inherent in the stones. The cylindrical stone is said to have a special efficacy in the cure of stomach disease. The afflicted come and roll on the platform (much as the stone was rolled/pulled by bullocks in the field?) in order to be cured.

The next two image types are more likely to be found in the neighborhoods of the inner city, rather than in the countryside. The first consists of a male figure carved in bas-relief on a small slab of stone. A number of these figures are extremely individual in character, often seated and exhibiting clothing of a pre-modern era. Others--hardly more than rough, featureless stones--have been painted or supplied with moustached metal masks in order to provide or clarify human outlines for the image. But most common of these bas-reliefs is a standing figure holding a battle axe (<u>pharsā</u>) or club over his right shoulder and a water pot (<u>lotā</u>) in his left hand (figure 7). This type of figure, too, may be extremely rough and worn and appear

quite old (figure 8). Others are newly-chiseled and painted to illuminate details such as a loin cloth, beard, top-knot, sectarian markings, and beads. This latter style of Bir image might be called the "martial ascetic," as it appears to be a mendicant carrying an axe or club. There are many small samādhis and memorial shrines to individual ascetics throughout the city containing an almost identical type of image. This has led to a certain amount of confusion about the identity of specific images and, in general, the appropriate iconography of either figure. One asks with some justification, "Why is the Bir depicted as an ascetic? Why does the Sadhu carry an axe or a club?" This reduction of iconography can be explained to some degree by the practice of the city´s image-sellers, who admit to offering the same general image to patrons wishing to establish an ascetic´s samādhi or the sthān of a Bir or Brahm. But this practice is no doubt a result rather than a cause of the interpenetration of heroic and ascetic traditions--discussed in the last chapter--and the Bir´s original lack of specific anthropomorphic iconography, a vacuum which has invited several different solutions. Another solution is the following.

The ongoing activity of recovering pieces of broken sculpture and temple fragments has resulted in a large

number of Bir Baba images (figures 9 and 10). These sculptural remnants are found in abundance in this old and continuously-inhabited city. They are uncovered during construction or are resurrected by fishermen from the Ganga where many were deposited precisely because of their damaged state.[10] These fragments may be placed under trees, on platforms with other images, set into wall niches, or housed in a simple temple structures. These resurrected fragments are rarely neglected, partly because their very discovery is interpreted as a sign of the image´s self-revelation or emergence under its own power (mūrti apne āp niklī or apne āp prakaṭ huī). These "self-emerging images" are themselves part of an old Indic tradition, the foremost example being the Puranic revelation of the liṅga[11] and the various svayambhū ("self-existent") liṅgas of Shiva located at the deity´s mountainous pilgrimage sites.[12] This revelation is itself the legitimation of a Bir´s establishment and worship. The Bir is said to appear to a person in a vision or dream, telling the location of his image. He will promise help, protection and the "fulfillment of all desires" to those who honor and worship him. Some Banaras Bir images are said to have been established by Brahman priests with the proper pratisthā ceremony, but it is very likely that most are

set up by non-Brahman priests or their finders with a simpler ritual dedication. The names given to these Birs may point to the image's visual peculiarities--Banaras' well-known Mur Kata Baba ("Head-Cut Baba") is a headless Buddhist or Jain figure; another "sky-clad" _tīrthaṅkara_ sculpture is simply called Nangan Bir ("Naked Bir"). The location of the discovered image occasionally determines the deity's proper name: Naruwa Bir and Penaru Bir were both found in excavated drainage ditches (_nala, panālā_) of the older city. Composit images are also made from several disparate pieces. The accidental discovery of lost or discarded stone images solves the problem of appropriate iconography for the Bir Baba. The original identity of the piece is unknown and unimportant, as is the _śāstrik_ convention which prohibits the use of a badly mutilated _mūrti_.[13] What _is_ authoritative is the revelation of the image and the subsequent proofs of power and efficacy that the deity is believed to exhibit. The remnants of a female figure may be established beside a Bir Baba and identified as a goddess, a Sati, his wife, or all of the above.

In summary, the Bir Baba images of Varanasi and the surrounding areas fall into four general categories: (1) the aniconic mounds, cones, or posts, and (2) open,

"empty" shrines; (3) the small, anthropomorphic carvings, and (4) images consisting of broken sculptural fragments. Among these, the aniconic mound-shapes and the "empty" shrines are most frequently encountered in rural settings, and the carved and "broken" images in the denser sections of the city. But the ongoing process of urban expansion has also resulted in the incorporation of many rural-type shrines into the life of growing city neighborhoods. Because the countryside is dotted with the ruins of temples and forts, it is also possible for a rural temple to house a "broken" image found at one of these sites.

Even within the period of one year, an observer may witness the growth and development of many Bir Baba temples and shrines. New shrines are established where none previously existed, and old sites undergo rejuvenation. Despite the newness of many shrines, the tendency is to attest to the great age of the Bir Baba at a particular site. The word "ancient" (pracīn) precedes the name of many Birs on the temple wall, and standard explanations are that a Bir lived "back when this area was all jungle," "before my grandfather's time," or "at the time of the Mahabharata War." When a new shrine appears, the image is said to have existed for generations before its revelation, hidden from view.

Just as often, an area containing a large, old tree surrounded by a platform covered with miscellaneous rough images will become the focus for development of a Bir Baba temple. In this case, the continuity of the site as a place of worship is very real.

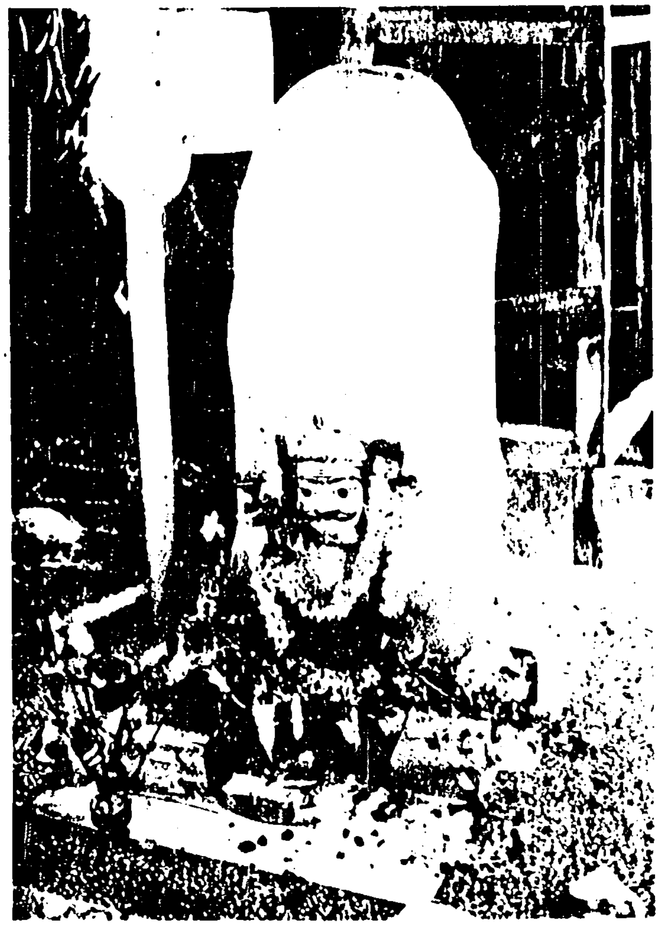
Once established, the temples and shrines may continue to undergo improvement as the interest and finances of local people permit. Some of the older Bir sites in the city are part of a complex that also contains a goddess shrine, community building, bathing tap and wrestling or exercise ground (akhāṛā or vyāyāmśālā) in addition to the Bir Baba temple and one or more large holy trees. Other shrines remain in a more rudimentary form.



Figure 1. Ahira Bir; Kolhua Vinayaka.



Figure 2. Karman Bir (one of two); Banaras Hindu University campus.





Figures 3 and 4. Lahura Bir; Lahurabir Crossing



Figure 5. Daitra Bir; Bari Gaivi

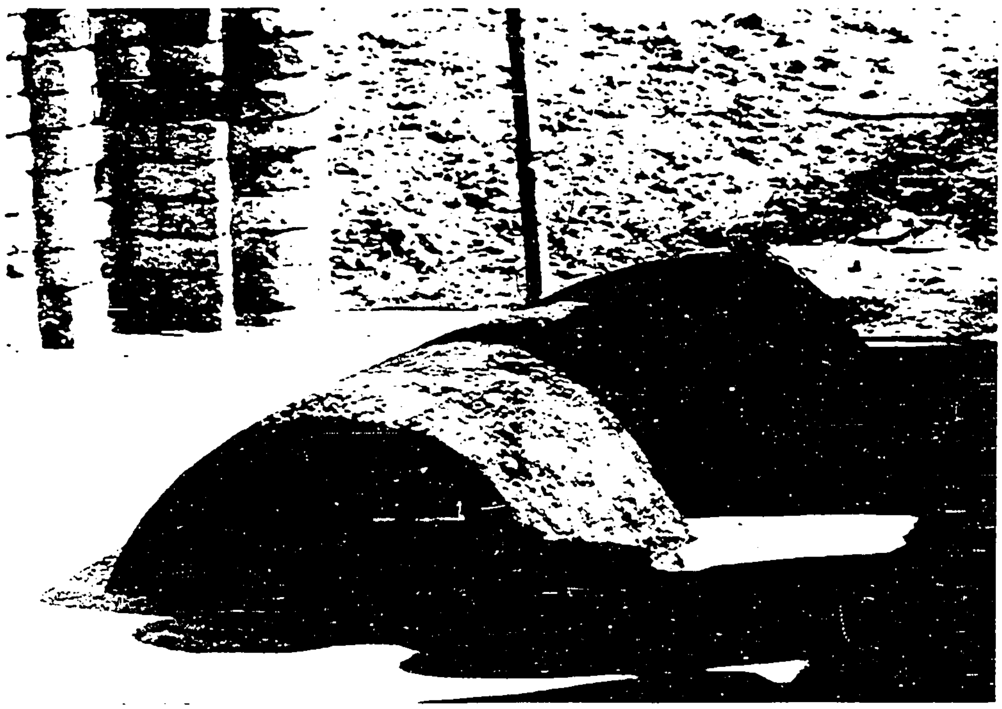


Figure 6. Kolhua Bir; Saraynandan



Figure 7. Daitra Bir; Painting on wall of Chait Ganj temple



Figure 8. Kankara Bir; Shankoddhara

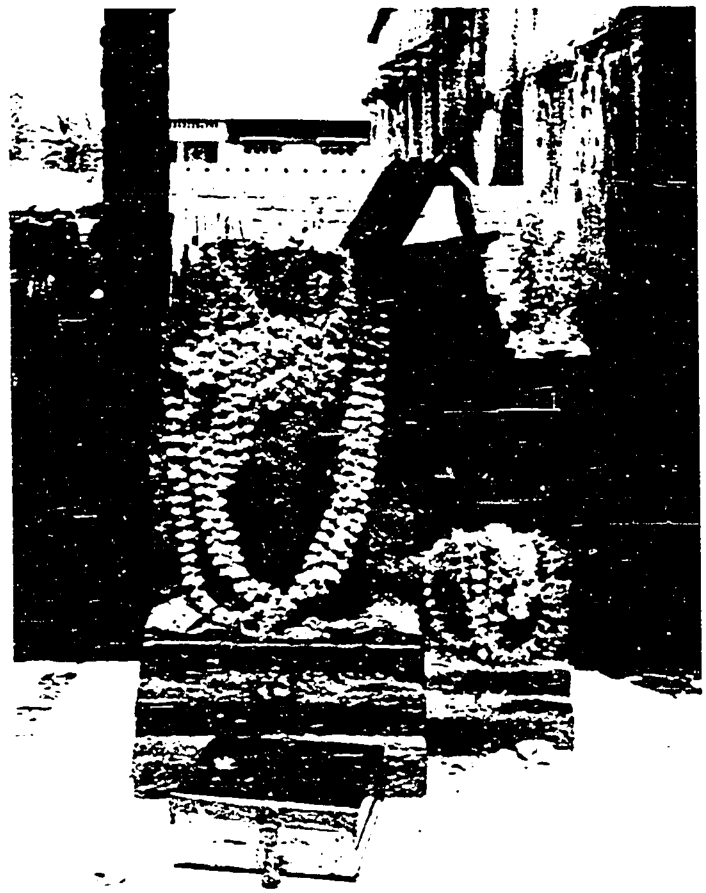


Figure 9. Mur Kata Baba; Durga Kund



Figure 10. Dyorhiya Bir; Bhelupur

NOTES

1.2 THE BIR IMAGE AND SHRINE

1 Monier Monier-Williams, Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Oxford, 1899; rpt. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), p. 1263.

2 Mahendra Chaturvedi and B.N. Tiwari, A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary, 6th ed. (Delhi: National, 1980), p. 424.

3 George Weston Briggs, Gorakhnāth and the Kānphata Yogīs (Calcutta, 1938; rpt. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), plate XI.

4 Letter received from Gunther Sontheimer, dated October 21, 1985. Sontheimer also says that "Gavlis and traditional tribals are also reputed to find a god in the forest, in the form of a piṇd, in an anthill."

5 Sontheimer discusses the associations of Biroba, Mhaskoba and Khandoba with the anthill: Birobā, Mhaskobā und Khaṇḍobā: Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von Pastoralen Gottheiten in Mahārāstra (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976, p. 182ff., 204f. See also David Dean Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 116 and notes 37 and 38, pp. 380-381, and John C. Irwin, "The Sacred Anthill and the Cult of the Primordial Mound," History of Religions 21, no. 4 (1982), 339-360.

6 David M. Knipe, "Night of the Growing Dead: A Virabhadra Cult in Coastal Andhra," unpublished conference paper, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Anaheim, California, November 24, 1985.

7 Roghair, Epic, Plate 8.

8 W.G. Archer, The Vertical Man: A Study in Primitive Indian Sculpture (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1947), and Anncharlott Eschmann, "Hinduization of Tribal Deities in Orissa: The Śākta and Śaiva Typology," in The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa, ed. Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke and Gaya

Charan Tripathi (Delhi: Manohar, 1978), pp. 79-98.

9 Crooke, Religion, pp. 324-5.

10 "If an image is broken in parts or reduced to particles it should be removed according to śāstrik rules and another should be installed in its place... The Agnipurana prescribes (chap. 67.3-6) that an image ... of stone may be thrown into water ..." Pandurang Vaman Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973) IV, 904, 905. This was also described to me by several Banaras pandits.

11 See Stella Kramrisch, The Presence of Śiva (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 153 ff.

12 See S.M. Bhardwaj, Hindu Places of Pilgrimage: A Study in Cultural Geography (Berkeley, 1973).

13 See note 10.

1.3 Worship of the Birs

The lower end of the caste spectrum makes up the largest portion of Bir worshippers, from what might be regarded as ´clean Shudra´ herdsmen, agriculturalists and artisans, groups of ´tribal´ ancestry, to those considered "untouchable" or Harijan. These include Ahir, Gaderiya, Kunbi, Kurmi, Kumhar, Mali, Pasi, Bhar, Rajbhar, Kol, Gond, Manjhi, Mallah, Khatik, Teli, Dhobi, Dom, Chamar, Rai Das, etc. A small percentage of middle and high caste members, including Brahmans, are devotees of particular Bir Babas as well. This is especially true of older community shrines which house venerable local deities seen as protectors of all rather than identified with particular castes or occupational groups. The uneducated are most numerously represented among Bir worshippers, but the reputation of certain shrines may draw considerable attendance from the ranks of the educated, including the more westernized middle classes.

Varanasi Bir Babas are worshipped most frequently by those living in their immediate neighborhoods. Flowers, incense and Ganga water are offered by individuals returning from bathing in the river, or from

darśan (an expression used more commonly than pūjā) at other temples. The Birs, like the rest of the city's gods, are worshipped more intensively during the festival days or seasons of the year: the two Nav Ratras, Diwali, Shiv Ratri, Holi, etc. On Holi, for instance, the devout make a circuit of their neighborhood and worship all the local gods by throwing the bright red gulāl powder at the images, much as is done on Rang Bhari Ekadashi (Phalgun Sh. 11) at some larger temples in the city. In this way the local deities are included in the annual festival cycle, and some modest attempt is made to honor them in the manner of Varanasi's major gods.

The central yearly event in celebration of individual urban Bir shrines is the vārṣik śṛṅgār or "Annual Decoration" Ceremony. This event is, again, in emulation of the ritual programming of the large temples, although its elevated sounding name and announcements appearing in local newspapers promising a "Sanskritic Program" (sānskṛtik kāryakram) do not necessarily describe the simple and straightforward celebrations that retain many 'folk' and rustic elements. This ceremony often takes place in the month of Kartik (Oct./Nov.), but may be scheduled on any other date deemed appropriate or auspicious. Critical to the

programming of the affair is the energy, time, and enthusiasm mustered by a small core of local people. A "Shringar Committee" will volunteer or be selected to oversee the collection of contributions (candā) that finance the ceremony. With this money the shrine will receive at very least a new coat of whitewash or paint, and the image decorated with strand upon strand of bright flower garlands. Strings of colored lights transform the area around the shrine. Loudspeakers and canopies are set up if the central pūjā is to be accompanied by a musical program. The main celebration generally begins toward evening, when the constant stream of people making special offerings at the shrine increases in volume. Most women come before nightfall, visit the deity and return to their homes. Men and children linger in anticipation of the later activities. A non-Brahman priest or temple caretaker may be present to receive the flood of small offerings (flowers, sweets, coins, fruit, cannabis, the burning of incense and camphor) and bless the worshippers with a tilak of ash.[1] When sufficient numbers have gathered around the shrine, the performance of āratī begins. The waving of a lamp around the image and shrine comes to a climax with loud chanting (X bīr bābā kī jay! "Victory to X

Bir Baba!") and furious ringing of bells. The *āratī* flame is then circulated by the priest so that all may share in the deity's blessing. *Prasād*, in the form of sweets and pieces of fruit, is distributed. This straightforward *āratī pūja* may be followed by an all-night performance of *bhajans* (devotional songs) and other folk or popular music. Professional singers of *birahā*--mainly from the Ahir caste--are most frequently invited, but Muslim singers of *qawwālī* (Islamic devotional songs) are also asked to perform. No one seems uncomfortable with the presence of Muslim performers at the celebration of a 'Hindu' deity. The singers are respected for their talent and reputation, and the music is thoroughly enjoyed by everyone. Although the praises of Allah are sung, most of the *qawwālī* repertoire seems to be chosen for its universalistic appeal as a religion of tolerance and brotherhood. The *birahā* performances are presented in the form of a *dangal* ("contest" or "competition") in which two groups of singers will set up facing each other, alternate singing, and compete for the attention and favor of the crowd. Each group does its best to outdo the other in whatever type of genre is being presented: the most beautiful devotional song, the most rousing social message, the most humorous jokes or plays

on words. The subjects of birahā music are only slightly more appropriate to the type of deity being celebrated. One Ahir singer explained that he divided his program into songs of three distinct sentiments: vīr ras, bhakti ras, and hansī ras--the heroic, devotional, and humorous.[2] Their purpose is to entertain an audience with what it wants to hear, and this not infrequently includes Hindi film music and other mixed genre heavily influenced by the same.[3] Nita Kumar reports the incidence of this type of neighborhood temple śṛṅgār to be increasing, a finding supported by my own observations.[4]

A Bir Baba may also be feted with a demonstration of the martial arts. At one such event witnessed by the writer, the audience was seated around a sandy arena where members of a half-dozen of the city's wrestling akhāṛās or vyāyāmśālās (organizations of wrestlers or body-builders) matched their skills. Pairs of combatants--from very young boys to their expert teachers--demonstrated their dexterity at wrestling and the use of arms, including stylized lāṭhī and sword-play. The contests were followed by an evening procession to the Bir shrine and pūjā.[5] This latter type of event in honor of a Bir is more rustic in tone

than the *vārṣik śṛṅgār*, and relates more directly to the identity of a Bir as martial hero.

The most famous and powerful Birs are the foci of large, annual *melās* or religious fairs. These fairs take place outside the city, but are attended by city residents. The largest Melas in the region belong to Kedariya Bir of Jaunpur and Bechu Bir, outside of Aharaura, Mirzapur. A description of the latter follows.

> Bechu Bir Mela Ended
>
> Aharaura (Mirzapur) A tremendous crowd of devotees was seen at Aharaura's famous and ancient Bechu Bir Mela. This amazing gathering of people numbered over 20,000. Even three days before [the Mela began] the jungle area was filled with men and women. The women visibly outnumbered the men. Large caravans of private and roadway busses, tempo-taxis and trucks were assembled to transport the crowd. [*Aj*, November 10, 1981]
>
> Aharaura (Mirzapur) This area's famous Bechu Bir Mela ended with a larger crowd in comparison with other years. A huge number of women who believe in *bhūt-pret* attended this historical Mela, and made offerings and vows to Bechu Bir. [*Aj*, November 30, 1982]

The annual Mela held at the shrine of Bechu Bir outside the town of Aharaura is the largest in the region. It is held each year around the time of Kartik Ekadashi (November), and draws thousands of pilgrims from neighboring districts. Hundreds of pilgrims travel

from Varanasi alone, the round trip journey requiring six to eight hours of travel by bus and a four to six hour walk through the rough "jungle" terrain in order to reach the small shrine of the Bir and back again. Most of the pilgrims walk the six kilometers of the hot, dusty trail, a journey that seemed the distance "from Banaras to Calcutta" to one tired devotee. As the newspaper reports indicate, the pilgrims are predominantly women, traveling in groups from the many villages in the region. On the Mela days, a seemingly endless, shimmering ribbon of bright sāṛīs weaves its way through the hilly tract between the end of the paved road at Aharaura and the cautarā of the Bir outside a small village. Occasional jeeps navigate the bumpy track carrying well-dressed urban families; Public Carrier trucks transport the weary but less-privileged, especially on the return trip.

For the three days of the Mela an entire marketplace is set up on the barren ground directly surrounding the shrine, making available the usual provender of tea, fried snacks, cooked vegetables and unyeasted bread. Stalls selling religious paraphernalia, flower garlands, toys, trinkets, and women's ornaments contribute further variety to the scene. Many groups of pilgrims remain at the site for a

night or two, sleeping in make-shift lean-tos and cooking their meals in large clay vessels. Each morning at dawn the Bir's *pūjā* is performed by an officiant, after which the general worship of the masses and the possession activity begins. Incredible numbers of pilgrims make their way to the shrine, placing before the Bir incense, flower garlands, sweets, bottles of *ghī* (clarified butter), cannabis, and cloth. The Bir image is a curved, whitewashed cone set on a square platform under the shade of a large *nīm* tree. During the Mela, the image is covered with layers of yellow, orange, and white garments (*dhotī* and *pīyarī*) and large marigold garlands. Attendants must periodically remove these offerings to huge piles accumulating beside the shrine. The *ghī* is deposited in small bottles in the fire pit (*havan kuṇḍ*) beneath the platform of the deity, and blood from the nicked ears of male goats is offered in lieu of animal sacrifice. Each pilgrim is permitted to bring offerings directly to the Bir and receive his blessing, but at times of peak attendance shrine caretakers assist in this process.

Offerings to Bechu Bir are generally part of the initiation or fulfillment of a vow; the deity's ability to help with these petitions is one foundation of his

reputation. Another motivation for pilgrimage is relief from the illness or misfortune caused by ghosts. Hundreds of people--mostly women--are possessed at the site, their frenzy beginning as soon as they cross the Jhalahiya River on the last leg of the pilgrimage journey. They loosen their hair, break their bangles, and begin to run toward the shrine. The "playing" (khelnā, havānā) of the possessed produces a strange cacophony of crazed laughter, moans, and shrieks; the body movements are wild and rhythmic, yet contained to a small space on the crowded ground. No exorcists preside: the victims of spirit attack come with family and friends, and are cured through the power and grace of the Baba. Like other deities described as Bhut Nath ("Lord of Ghosts"), Bechu Bir is believed to have authority over lesser spirits and the presence of the Bir is sufficient to cause their manifestation, "speaking," and eventual removal from the body of a victim. The shareholders of the shrine of Bechu Bir deny a special role in the healing process; they simply facilitate the proceedings of the Mela and reap its financial rewards. All claim that those badly afflicted by ghosts must attend this event four to six years running in order to obtain a permanent cure. The day of Kartik Ekadashi is the "returning day" (wāpasī din) of

the Mela, when pilgrims break their temporary camps after the morning pūjā and head back to their villages.

In addition to these collective forms of worship, Bir Babas are approached most frequently in private by individuals who have special needs, desires or requests (manautī). These petitioners make an initial offering when they confront the deity with a request, and make a vow (manautī mānanā) to perform further services or ritual offerings if their wish is fulfilled (manautī pūrī ho jānā). These requests are familiar: the cure and prevention of illness, help with family problems and disputes, aid in finding a lost object, removal of the obstacles to fertility, the finding of a job, success in a court case or the outcome of an exam. A Bir is believed to be most receptive to these problems on his special days--Tuesday or Sunday. A supplicant will praṇām (salute with folded hands) or prostrate before the image and offer sweets, flowers, incense and dhār: a ´cooling´ mixture of five dried and powdered fruits mixed with Ganga water and poured from a loṭā. Substances of a more tamāsik quality are also acceptable to the deity: camphor, cannabis, liquor, cut nutmegs or lemons (the simulacrum of blood sacrifice), and the slaughter of a cock, pig, or goat. These latter

substances are considered more potent and dangerous, and are offered by those who subscribe to "tantric methods" (tantrik paddhati se) of pleasing or coercing the deity. The Bir Babas are said to accept these offerings (literally to "eat" them), and are especially fond of gaňjā, which is smoked frequently by men in the vicinity of the shrine. Numerous among the private petitioners are the healers and exorcists (ojhā, sokhā, guṇī) who depend upon the cooperation of Bir Babas in their dealings with the spirit world. Some of the Banaras area Birs are more famous than others for their assistance with the work of ojhāī. The connection between Bir and Ojha will be discussed at length in Part 1.5 below.

People who have been helped by a Bir Baba are prominent and vocal among the devotees. The most common testimonial to a Bir´s power is that he is very "alert" or "awake" (wo bahut jāgta bīr hai), meaning that he is attentive to the needs of his worshippers and active in their fulfillment. The Bir Babas are one class among the deities said to be "awake" in the Kali Yuga, including others such as the Goddess and Hanuman. But the nature of the work set before the Birs clearly defines the limits of their efficacy as equal to the constant and immediate problems of daily life,

especially those caused by 'magical' forces (jādū-ṭonā, "magic, sorcery;" nazar, burā tāke, "evil eye") or spirit agents. These "awake" and immanent deities are more responsive than the greater gods, and their power is more appropriate to these concerns. Yet there is more than this to the appeal of the Bir Babas. Many figures--whose legends have a particularly heroic cast--are models of exemplary human behavior.[6] Of equal importance to the worshipper is the accessibility of the Bir to all who approach him, regardless of ritual purity, sex, or caste. The participants in this tradition are proud of the fact that anyone may directly worship the Bir--even an untouchable--without the necessity of a priest or intermediary. When non-Brahman priests and caretakers (and occasionally Brahman priests) act in these roles, it is only for its ceremonial value or efficiency. The nature of individual worship is uncomplicated: a salutation, offerings, and āratī performed with incense or a lamp. Even when attempts to promote a particular shrine take on a 'Sanskritized' tone, these straightforward patterns of worship are maintained. In many aspects of the cult one can see a self-consciousness and even rebelliousness vis-a-vis Brahmanical modes of worship and ritual. This

rebelliousness extends to more mundane matters as well. This writer was amazed at the number of temple sites that were in dispute or involved in some form of litigation. The pattern was that of a socially powerless yet defiantly organized group of low caste men and women fighting an upper-caste landlord for the right to maintain access to a Bir shrine and the bit of land surrounding it. This kind of activity is not surprising given the number of relatively new or recently developed Bir Baba shrines in the city. One would be very naive not to recognize the social and political benefits of participation in the activity of these shrines. Sometimes the development of a shrine is undertaken in a true spirit of neighborhood uplift and improvement. At other times one faction is clearly seeking to extend its influence and control. Often a powerful local figure or aspiring politician will seek to enhance his reputation and community standing by subsidizing major ceremonial events in the age-old tradition of temple patronage. As always, the motives and motivations of worshippers are complicated mixtures of ´spiritual´ and ´mundane´ concerns.



Figure 11. Lahura Bir´s Varshik Shringar;
wife of Pujari fills in as officiant

NOTES

1.3 WORSHIP OF THE BIRS

[1] Occasionally a Brahman is employed to conduct the pūjā for a Bir temple's Annual Decoration Ceremony. On one occasion this writer saw photographs of an elaborate havan pūjā that was conducted by two Brahman priests in honor of Madarawa Bir of Kirhiya in 1979.

[2] Personal interview at the shrine of Siha Bir, Ramnager, Oct. 11, 1981.

[3] For more about the musical genre of birahā, see Scott Marcus, "The Rise of a Folk Music Genre," conference paper, Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting, March 2, 1986; proposed for publication as "The Rise of a Folk Music Tradition: Biraha, a Folk Music Genre of the Banaras Region," in _The Popular History of a North Indian City: Essays on Banaras in the 19th and 20th Centuries_, ed. Sandria B. Freitag.

[4] For more information on the musical aspects of the vārṣik śṛṇgār, see Nita Kumar, "Popular Culture in Urban India: The Artisans of Banaras, c. 1884-1984," Diss. University of Chicago 1984, pp. 198-217.

[5] This affair was held at Narayanpur's Jog Bir Baba shrine on March 29, 1981.

[6] This is true of figures such as Khojawa's Agyawan Bir, who is held by members of the temple's wrestling akhāṛā to have been the ideal wrestler: skilled, restrained and compassionate. [Personal interview at Agyawan Bir, July 18, 1981.]

1.4 Bir as Guardian Deity

The Village Guardian

In the countryside around Varanasi the word for the village guardian deity is <u>ḍīh</u>, used interchangeably with variants <u>ḍīhā</u> and <u>ḍīhwār</u>. These are generic terms which signify the guardians or protectors of the entire village unit, and do not refer to village deities in general, many of which are perceived as guardians of more specific function or smaller social entities. A Dih will often have a proper name, in which case a villager might say, "This is X; he is the Dih Baba of our village." The designation Dih (Diha or Dihwar) is most frequently used for the male guardian or Dih Baba, but it may also refer to the female guardian or to the guardian pair, understood either as husband and wife or two separate deities associated only in their role as protectors of village boundaries. Occasionally the female guardian will be referred to as Dihwarin, a feminized form of Dihwar.

As to the origin of the terms, Crooke has written:[1]

> In Northern India the village godlings are often collectively called Dīwār, a term probably derived from Sanskrit <u>deva-ālī</u> or <u>āvalī</u>, 'race, family, dynasty of gods,' though the association of the Persian <u>dīh</u>, used in the Musalman revenue system to denote the

> village or taxable unit, may have contributed to its use in the case of the village guardians.

Here Crooke suggests both Sanskrit and Persian derivations for the term dīwār. In Platts Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English the same word--meaning "the god or ´genius loci´ under whose special care a village is placed (and for whom a portion of grain is always set apart at each harvest)"[2] --is assigned a "probable" derivation from the Sanskrit deva + āl[?]. It is not surprising that researchers would assume a Sanskrit origin for the term, yet the information at hand indicates that Crooke´s second suggestion is the more accurate. It seems clear that the word for the North Indian guardian deity is derived from the Persian word deh or dih, meaning a town or village.[3] Even a brief glance at a map of the area surrounding Varanasi reveals dozens of towns and villages which retain the Persian dih (here as ḍīh) in their proper names: Ram Dih, Bara Dih, Niyar Dih, etc., the second element serving as an alternate for the other Hindi words meaning "village." Thus "Dih Baba" neatly expresses an identity between the village and its supernatural guardian. But even more interesting for the purposes of this inquiry, is that the word dih seems to have taken on a new semantic dimension in its North Indian context. As well as

"village" or "town," dictionaries of Hindi and Urdu define the word <u>ḍīh</u> as "haunt, the site or ruins of a deserted village, the dwelling place of the ancestors, a heap of earth or mound, the place where worship of the village gods takes place," and simply "village gods (<u>grām</u> <u>devatā</u>)."[4] These other meanings of <u>ḍīh</u> enrich our understanding of how a village is perceived: it is not just the dwelling place of the living, but a place where ancestors have died; a place, perhaps, established and actualized by the death of an ancestor whose remains are buried in a mound on the periphery. What is suggested by the dictionary meanings of <u>ḍīh</u> corresponds perfectly with the statements made by residents about their village guardians: these deities were once-living members of their community, now valorized as ancient heroes associated with a village's dim beginnings. Crooke makes similar observations when writing about village guardian deities in the Panjab:[5]

> In the Panjab ... Khera Deota, the impersonation of the village mound, and his colleague Chanwand are often confounded with Bhūmiya, and their cult is closely connected with that of the Jathera, 'place of the elder,' which represents the common ancestor of the clan or village ... who has special influence over cows, and to whom the first milk of every cow is offered. Or, again, there [in the Panjab] is identified with the Theh or Thiya, the mound which marks the site of the parent village of the tribe. In Central Panjab the Jathera may be dedicated to a progenitor of

> the clan, the founder of the village, any prominent member of it, or to a Sati who died with her husband. Elsewhere the Bhūmiya differs from the Jathera. When a village is founded a mound is raised and near it a Jand tree is planted; the first man who dies, whatever his caste may be, is buried or burnt on this mound, and a shrine is dedicated to him as the village guardian.

The names and associations of these village deities may differ from place to place, but there is a marked tendency throughout the entire region for the original village guardian--as well as other guardians of more specialized dominion--to be conceived of as human dead from a former era, whose remains were ritually enshrined in such as a crude earth mound to ensure their continued protection of the village unit.

Also interesting in Crooke's paragraph are the words "Theh" and "Thiya" denoting "the mound which marks the site of the parent village of the tribe." These terms are phonologically similar to others in Hindi and Urdu which also mean "heap" or "mound:" ḍīhā, ḍhūā, ḍhī, ḍhūh, ḍhūhā, ḍhoh,[6] which in turn resemble the Sanskrit stūpa through the variants thūā and thūhā. Whether or not there is an actual linguistic association between the Persian word for "village," through a series of items meaning "mound" to the Sanskrit stūpa, it does appear that the semantic load of the term ḍīh was extended to include the idea of a mound marking the

ruins of a deserted habitation, or a mound containing the remains of departed ancestors, aided perhaps, by the phonological similarities.

The village Dih is said to be an "ancient" (prācīn) deity whose shrine is established when the village itself is founded. Part of what defines a village as such is the existence of its guardian deity/deities, who control the ingress and egress of all ´supernatural´ forces and influences across village boundaries. Village people use the following expressions to describe the Dih Baba´s function as guardian: he is the "village protector" (gaon kā rakṣā kārne wālā, rakṣak or rakwārī), the [´supernatural´] "head" of the village (mālik, mukhiyā), the village "police chief" (kotwāl), or--by those familiar with the Sanskrit term--the "area or regional guardian" (ksetrapāl). The Diha, as "head" of a village, performs similar functions to the human official, except that his realm of authority extends to minor village deities, ghosts, other more vaguely defined ´magical´ energies, and--by extension--those humans who would wish to manipulate these beings and forces. Any human act which attempts to propitiate, exorcise, or otherwise control the ´supernatural´ must begin with the Diha´s permission and blessing, or the "work" cannot succeed. Yet because the deity is

ambivalent in character, one is not always assured of the desired results. One individual explained the Diha's authority in the following way:[7]

> Before any work begins, one must worship the village Diha. Every village has one Diha. The Diha must first give permission. A ghost must also ask the Diha's permission to enter the village. If the Diha is happy with you he will not allow the ghost to enter the village. But sometimes the Diha will "eat" the offerings and still allow the ghost to enter the village.

Likewise, when a deity is installed in the village or home, it must be accomplished with permission from the Dih.[8] At the time of a village wedding, part of the worship of all important family and village deities by the couple includes offering the ceremonial thread (kangan), or the grooms's headdress (maur) at the shrine of the Dih Baba. At the birth of a child--especially a son--offerings will be made at the shrine. Similar rituals will be performed when a special desire has been fulfilled by the guardian deity.[9] The Dih is ideally worshipped by the entire village once or twice a year, but human nature and village politics may make this difficult to accomplish. If this neglect results in misfortune, disease, or disaster for all or part of the village, special ceremonies must be conducted to correct this lapse in ritual responsibility. In 1982 the village of Kojawa, immediately flanking Banaras,

collectively worshipped its Dih when great hardship was caused by monsoon floods.

The nature of the relationship between male and female guardian deities is an interesting and complex one. As mentioned previously, the Dih Baba is often paired with a village goddess, sometimes referred to as Dihwarin. Occasionally, especially if the goddess is a Sati and their stories are woven together in some manner, the two are said to be husband and wife; but this is not necessarily or perhaps even fundamentally so. Most village Dih-Matas ("Mothers") seem to be of independent origin and are paired with the Dih Baba only in their joint and somewhat complimentary roles as village guardians. Two names frequently encountered for this type of village goddesses are "Chaura Mata" ("Devi" or "Mai")--a caurā being the platform for the village deities, including the various "mounds" which represent the deified dead--and another called "Sayar (or Saiyar) Mai".[10] When a villager says that, "That is the Dih; that is the Sayar" (wo ḍīh hai, wo sāyar hai), he is indicating the Dih Baba-Dih Mata guardian pair. A village goddess of either name is generally represented by a mound, indicating her origin as a Sati or another type of pacified ghost. One hagiographic story told about a "Chaura Devi" occupying the same temple complex

with a Dih/Bir Baba emphasized the selflessness and saintliness of the human figure, qualities for which she is honored by local people long after her death. Others tell that she was a Sati from the Teli (Oil Presser) _jātī_.[11] The village Dih Baba may also be paired with what is more clearly a goddess of disease, often Sitala Mata herself. In this case the Dih is approached by worshippers with ghost-related problems, and the goddess propitiated to control the infectious diseases which she herself embodies. But even in this situation, many say that the Dih Baba has the ultimate authority over his partner.

This ´balance of power´ in the working relationship of the guardian pair reveals the tendency in many areas of North India for male village deities to dominate the female. Male village guardians are almost always said to have the ´last word´ in matters of village welfare, especially regarding the integrity and transgression of village boundaries. It is said that the village Mata--often a disease goddess--must obtain the Dih´s permission if she is to display her anger (_devī_ _kā_ _kop_) by an outbreak of disease. Villagers may prevent this by regular propitiation of the Dih Baba, or by enlisting his aid in pacifying and removing the goddess when an outbreak occurs. When paired with a Sati or another

more benevolent goddess, the male deity's energy always seems to predominate. Planalp supports this observation in his description of the ritual removal of the disease goddess, Bhagavati Mai, from Senapur village:[12]

> The villagers ask Goraya Baba's [the village Dih] permission to escort Bhagavati Mai from the village. (Propitiation of Goraya Baba is considered especially important during epidemics of smallpox and cholera, because it is believed that the village guardian only allows the disease goddess to enter the settlement if he is angry with the villagers.)

Wadley makes the following statement about the balance of power in the local pantheon of her area of fieldwork (Mainpuri District, Uttar Pradesh):[13]

> ... the male deities can always dominate the female deities, both ultimately in actions over men and also within the pantheon itself. One may say that males can put down or contradict females of equal rank.

Kolenda, in her article on the goddess Sitala Mata in an Indian village 100 miles north of Delhi, also reports this finding:[14]

> Mother Pox belongs to a middle rank in the local hierarchy of supernatural powers. She and other goddesses are vaguely subordinate to the three high male deities [a Muslim Pir, Shiva, and the "earth godling" Bhumiya] in both power and rank. One could hope to call upon the power of one of these gods to counteract the power of the mother goddess.

These observations indicate a significant reversal in the position of male and female village deities as found, for instance, in areas of South India,

Maharashtra and Bengal, and are deserving of further research and attention.[15] But suffice it here to note this dynamic in the relationship of the Banaras region's guardian pair.

The City Neighborhood Guardian

The urban counterpart of the village guardian is the Banaras neighborhood Dih. This urban Dih, often but not necessarily paired with a goddess, is conceived in almost identical terms to the village guardian, except that its territory is the considerably smaller and more intimate unit of the city neighborhood. This deity described as "the god" or "protector of the neighborhood" (mahal kā devatā, muhallā kā rakwārī), rather than of the village. There are hundreds of Dih shrines in the city of Banaras. Except for certain areas of the city that were long ago settled by groups from other regions of India--the Bengali or or South Indian neighborhoods, for example--it seems like every section or minutely divided sub-section of the city boasts its own "Dih Baba" or Dih pair, integral to that neighborhood's conception of itself as a discreet and bounded unit within the larger and sometimes intersecting official and historical divisions of the city. Where a Dih shrine is relatively old, it is more likely to be

viewed with fondness and respect by all of the local residents, regardless of caste.[16] A large portion of the shrines surveyed in Varanasi neighborhoods were established or underwent improvement (were "reclaimed" as it were) within the last 20-30 years. These relatively recent shrines are more likely to be identified with narrower segments of the population. This is especially true in the new neighborhoods that are forming on the periphery of the city or filling out every pocket of available land in internal areas. Many of these new shrines are found in low caste neighborhoods, or by low caste people in mixed neighborhoods. Not infrequently a Dih temple is championed as the patron deity of a coalition of low castes, hoping to exercise their collective power to save or develop a cherished bit of ground. Or a local group, not necessarily of low caste, will attempt to enhance its prestige or foster its political interests by sponsoring the building of a new neighborhood temple. Many of the newer shrines are also the objects of ongoing litigation by way of determining land rights and ownership. These sorts of tensions are typical of the politics of newly constructed or activated shrines, a frequent occurrence in this rapidly-growing city. What is interesting about the Banaras Dih shrines is that they

seem to be a transposition of a specific type of rural deity into the urban environment; a projection of the idea of the bounded, guarded microcosm of the village onto the city neighborhood. This is not to say that Kashi--the ancient name of Banaras--is lacking in guardian deities, but that the Dih Babas are an additional set of these. They are the guardians of even more minutely divided and subdivided bits of inhabited territory, the most personal, immediate and responsive among the guardians of the microcosm. As has been suggested, this vision of the neighborhood Dih Babas and their consecutive domains is strongest and clearest among the lower classes. It is both a reflection of and a counterpoint to the Brahmanical vision of the _mandala_ of guardianship as described by the _Kashi Khanda_ and alive in the minds of many of Banaras' inhabitants.[18] But one might also say that these two traditions in a sense combine to form a workable continuum of guardianship, ranging from the Shivas, Goddesses, Ganeshas and Bhairavas to the multiplicity of Dihs.

As we have stated earlier, the neighborhood Dihs are conceived in equivalent terms to their rural counterparts. Like the village deities, they control the boundaries of their domains, especially with regard to the exit and entry of the intangible agents of

illness, misfortune and disease. They are asked for blessings as part of any major undertaking--ritual or otherwise--and are propitiated when trouble occurs. They are the appropriate deities to seek out if one feels harmed by the "evil eye" (burā tāke). They are plied with the "heart's desires" (manautī) of local people, and are important to the work of ojhāī: exorcism and divination. The Dihs are worshipped annually by the entire neighborhood in the form of the vārṣik śṛṅgār, a ceremony adapted from the ritual repertoire of the major urban temples. They are worshipped as a part of all seasonal festivals, and often receive the ritual thread and crown of a newly-married couple as part of the post-wedding worship of the Ganga (gangā pūjā).

The transposition of the Dih from village to city has also brought about some subtle changes. The city Dih is conceived of in very personal terms. One local group referred to their Dih as the "Son-in-Law" (damād) of the neighborhood. People would talk of the deity's love of children, and the shrine is indeed a place where children and others congregate. One individual related how his neighborhood Dih would help laborers carry their heavy loads when they stopped to rest near the shrine. Many adults remember how, as a frightened child, they were safely guided home by their Dih Baba. It is said

that if one merely invokes the name of the guardian deity, he will dispel all fear and see to the safety of the traveller. The Dih is especially active at night. He patrols the boundaries of his district wrapped in a black blanket, visiting and smoking gānjā with neighboring Dih friends and brothers. If one listens carefully, one may hear the hollow sound of his wooden sandals (kharāū̃) on the cobbled alleyways of the city. People will boast of their own Dih as the most powerful among the neighboring Dihs with whom they are familiar. Some of the neighborhood Dihs are known to all of the city residents, and are seen to specialize in certain kinds of rituals or cures.

Bir as Dih

In many of the villages immediately surrounding the city of Varanasi, a Bir fulfills the function of male guardian deity or Dih Baba. Each Bir/Dih possesses an individual name and oral tradition, although the latter may be minimal. While it is extremely common for a Bir to act in the role of village Dih, it is important to remember that not all of the Bir found in the countryside are Dih, nor are all the Dih Bir. The male guardian deity of a North Indian village may be one of a number of other deities: Hanuman, Bhairava, an 'earth

godling´ like Bhumiya, a Muslim Shahid or Pir. Very often the Dih Baba will be represented by a memorial or sthān consisting of a mound/cone on a raised platform, yet the origin and even the name of the deity is unknown. Some villagers view the popularity and proliferation of Bir shrines as a more recent phenomenon, insisting that the village Dih Baba is an ancient deity whose beginnings are beyond recall. There are also many Birs in rural areas that do not function as Dih. They may remain family, lineage, clan or caste deities, still identified with those groups who originally established the shrines. Other Birs might be viewed as village deities of more specialized function, such as protectors of fields and livestock. All this not withstanding, there does appear to be a consistent pattern in the Banaras region of Bir Babas serving as village guardians. In the city of Banaras, the identification of Dih and Bir is almost complete: every Dih this writer surveyed was a Bir, and almost every Bir was reported to be a Dih of some area, however small. Why is a Bir an appropriate deity for the role of guardian? And why are so many Bir shrines being established in Varanasi neighborhoods?

In North India it is not uncommon for Vira-type deities, including pan-Indian mythological figures and

deified local or quasi-historical martial heroes, to function as village guardians. Local manifestations of the "Monkey God" Hanuman, Bhairava, or the powerful Pandava Bhima or Bhimasena are examples of the first, martyred Muslim generals, warriors of a bona fide Hindu martial caste, tribal chieftains or other local figures who attained the status of "hero" before or after their deaths are examples of the last. The ´historical´ Viras continue in their rightful occupation: those who ruled and protected while living are expected to continue this service after death in exchange for the honor and worship of the local population. The power of the hero is enhanced by martyrdom and sacrifice, and redirected by worship to serve the living. Consistent with this, the Banaras Birs are often valorized by believers as courageous leaders and fighters, as individuals championed the powerless. But even without these overtly martial overtones, the Birs clearly fall within the tradition of the "mound deity" or Dih as described earlier in this chapter: the original ancestor, martyr, or human sacrifice who is ritually enjoined to the protection of the living.

Why are so many Bir/Dih shrines being established in Varanasi neighborhoods? Birs are not the only shrines found in every corner of crowded city alleyways,

or revitalized and incorporated into new neighborhoods as they expand into formerly rural areas. Shiva liṅgas, the shrines of Ganesh, Hanuman, and various local Devis are in abundance. Residents have a special regard for all their local shrines, and consider these deities almost as family members. They say that women and the old cannot easily travel beyond the limits of the neighborhood, that it is necessary for them to worship the gods near home. In fact, they testify, these local gods are every particle of the major deities at their more famous temple locations. The Bir is not the only personalized neighborhood deity, not the only one around which a sense of neighborhood solidarity may be built. But the Bir Babas, with their origins as unquiet dead, are perhaps the shrines most easily established without help or opposition from orthodox Hindus, and herein may lie the reason for their popularity. Individual Bir shrines have been ritually installed or worshipped by Brahman priests, but this is clearly not the norm. The Birs are discovered by or revealed to "small people" (chote log) in a vision or dream, and may be installed in a shrine by them with the simplest of ceremony. These small temples and shrines are places of worship and congregation for groups of people who may have no other such location to call their own. Some of the

shrines are the only sanctified areas in the entire neighborhood, rescued from development or the focus of a major effort of neighborhood improvement. But whatever the motivation behind the promotion of Bir temples and shrines, the fact remains that this activity takes place outside of orthodox convention, and may proceed with little orthodox aid or opposition. This is not to say that there is no orthodox disapproval. One Brahman pandit spoke about the proliferation of city Bir shrines as being a degeneration of Dharma. He said that it was the traditional responsibility of the Raja (and now the "government," sarkār), to use his authority (ḍaṇḍā, lit. "staff") to protect Dharma. But this is no longer done. He said that any hoodlum (guṇḍā) can now establish a temple for his own purposes.[18] The political use of these temples as well as the challenge they represent to traditional authority does not go unnoticed. Some point to the recent increase in wealth and political clout of members of the Ahir caste as reason for the growth of many shrines. One need only witness the annual procession of the devotees of Ravi Das--the patron saint of the untouchables--to know that there might be some reason for anxiety over the potential power of the organized lower classes.[19] Yet equally persuasive is the palpable need of people in the growing and ever more

densely crowded city environment to re-map and re-define the boundaries of where they live, carve an ordered space out of the city´s chaos, and protect that intimate space by the worship of a boundary deity. The Bir/Dih Baba, along with his partner goddess, is an appropriate deity for this purpose.

NOTES

1.4 BIR AS GUARDIAN DEITY

1 William Crooke, Religion and Folklore of Northern India (London, 1926; rpt. Delhi: S. Chand: 1972), p. 88.

2 John Thompson Platts, A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 559.

3 Francis Johnson, Dictionary of Persian, Arabic and English (London: W.H. Allen, 1852), p. 585.

4 Platts, Dictionary, p. 576: "ḍīh Haunt, place, dwelling, village, site of a deserted village. ḍīhā Heap of earth, mound, bank." Shyam Sundardas, ed., Hindī Śabdsāgar (Kāśī: Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā, 1965) II, 472 [my translation]: "ḍīh m. [Hindi] 1. habitation, settlement 2. small village 3. the ruins of a deserted village 4. mound 5. the place [sthān] where worship to the village gods takes place 6. the dwelling place of ancestors." Vol. IV, 1954-1955: "3. village gods [grām devatā]."

5 Crooke, Religion, p. 95.

6 Platts, Dictionary, p. 573: "ḍhūā [S.stūpa + ka] s.m. A heap of mud or earth, a mound, a boundary mark (=ḍholā). ḍhorā (i.q. ḍholā), s.m. Heap or mound of earth (raised by the side of a ditch). ḍhūlā ḍholā [S. sthūla + ka or stūp + la + ka; cf. ḍhūhā], s.m. A heap or mound of earth, a pillar of mud or brick, boundary-mark, landmark; bank (of a river & etc.) ... Marking a boundary & etc. with mud heaps or pillars;" p. 576: "ḍīhā (i.q. ḍhīhā, ḍhūhā,) s.m. Heap (of earth), mound, bank. ḍhī [prob. S.stiyā; cf. ḍhīhā; ḍhūhā], s.f. Heap, mound; high bank (of a river & etc.); site of a fallen house, a mass of ruins. ḍhūh, ḍhoh, s.m. Mound; (local) elevated ground in the midst of ravines. ḍhūhā, s.m. ḍhūā and ḍholā;" p. 348: "thūā A heap, mound;" p. 349: "thūhā;" p. 366: "ṭhīhā A mud pillar;" ṭhivā A mound, heap or lump of earth; a mud pillar, a boundary mark," etc.

7 Personal interview with Bhagat Channu, Adityanagar, Dec. 11, 1980. See also Part 1.5 below for the relationship of the Ojha and the Dih.

8 Senapur village goddesses "were installed as family goddesses, with the permission of Goraya Baba, the village Dih." Jack M. Planalp, "Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village," Diss. Cornell University 1956, p. 758.

9 Planalp, "Religious Life," pp. 190-1.

10 I have yet to discover the meaning or import of this particular name. Planalp also lists Dih Sayar together with Dih Varin [Dihwarin] in a roster of Senapur village deities. "Religious Life," p. 721.

11 Personal interview at the shrine of Chaura Devi and Baraicha Bir, Saraynandan village, September 16, 1981.

12 Planalp, "Religious Life," p. 753-4.

13 Susan S. Wadley, _Shakti: Power in the Conceptual Structure of Karimpur Religion_ (Chicago: Department of Anthropology, 1975), p. 121.

14 Pauline Kolenda, "Pox and the Terror of Childlessness: Images of the Smallpox Goddess in a North Indian Village," in _Mother Worship: Theme and Variations_, ed. James J. Preston (Chapel Hill: Univ. of N. Carolina Press, 1982), p. 228.

15 For discussions of village deities in other regions of India, see Whitehead, _Village Gods_, Elmore, _Dravidian Gods_, Richard L. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress: A Study of South Indian Village Goddesses and Their Religious Meaning," Diss. University of Chicago 1978, etc.

Dumont addresses this problem in his "A Structural Definition of a Folk Deity of Tamil Nad: Aiyanar, the Lord," in _Religion/Politics and History in India_ (Paris; The Hague: Mouton, 1970), pp. 23-6. He says the following about the standard works (note 19, p. 26): "The descriptions of Whitehead and Elmore establish that goddesses predominate on the local functional level in the Telugu country; they do not establish that village deities in the wider sense are ´almost exclusively

feminine´, and still less that ´Dravidian´ people worshipped only goddesses. These authors have probably underestimated the male principle to some extent."

16 These deities might be viewed by educated Brahmans as legitimate, albeit minor gods. One Brahman pujārī of a small Hanuman temple called the Bir/Dih the "watchmen" or "servants" (caukīdār, caprāsī) of the other gods.

17 For an excellent description of Kashi´s orthodox guardian deities see Diana L. Eck, Banaras: City of Light (New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1982).

18 Personal interview with Pandit Ram Puri Divedi, Sept. 25, 1981.

19 For more on the Ravi Das Movement, see Mark Juergensmeyer, Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in 20th-Century Punjab (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

1.5 The Exorcist, Exorcism, and the Bir

Among the many types of healers who ply their trade in Varanasi city and nearby villages, it is the rustic, low caste exorcist (*ojhā*)[1] who maintains a working relationship with local and regional Bir Babas as a regular part of his practice. Many Ojhas have Birs as personal deities and helpmates in their practice of exorcism, and must propitiate the Bir/Dih of a particular neighborhood or village before working in that area. Ojhas also seek the aid of the more famous regional Birs when the lesser deities prove inadequate. Because of this special relationship between the Ojha and the Bir, it is important to explore further this deity's significance in the context of *ojhāī* (or *ojhetī*), the exorcism, curing and magic performed by the Ojha.

The worldview that supports *ojhāī* has its roots in the Indian countryside. Its lore has no written source, and has as its main adherents the lower classes. Other village members may ridicule these "useless" fears and beliefs, yet are inclined to believe themselves when a series of disasters shake their lives. This worldview holds, in part, a theory of illness, suffering and

misfortune that is caused by the activity of ghosts or spirits and local 'godlings,' either acting out of their own natures and volitions, or inflicted upon one human by another. Relief from these conditions is sought by the propitiation or ritual coercion of these spirits or deities. The pantheon of "village deities" (grāmadevatā) may change in minor detail from one speaker or area to the next, but manifests a similar structure and texture throughout. Although this pantheon and worldview finds its fullest systemization in the rural areas, it selectively pervades the urban environment among the lower castes and classes, and often among high caste, uneducated women.[2] Varanasi city itself contains key centers of healing and exorcism that are a part of a regional 'network' of such sites.

The Ojha is a local healer/exorcist who specializes in the curing of illness, disease and alleviation of other kinds of misfortune believed to be caused by spirit agents. The titles Sokha (sokhā) and Guni (guṇī) are sometimes used to distinguish healers of greater skill, knowledge, and power than the common Ojha, but as often the three terms are used interchangeably. An Ojha may profess some knowledge of the healing value of metals, stones, herbs (jaṛī-būṭī), and amulets (jantra), and may also engage in forms of divination and 'sorcery'

(jādū-tonā), but primarily acts as an exorcist. The Ojha accomplishes his control over bothersome spirits both with the aid of a personal helping deity (or deities)--his "iṣṭ" (iṣṭadevatā) or "nijīdevatā"--and through the use of a mantra which he has "perfected" (mantra siddh karnā) through repetition under appropriate ritual circumstances.

The Goddess (devī), especially in her tantric or disease goddess manifestations, is extremely important to the work of ojhāī. Most of the Ojhas with whom this writer had contact were special devotees of the Goddess (devī bhakta), and had taken a form of the Goddess as at least one of their personal deities. During the period of his sādhana (program of spiritual practice for the acquisition of powers) the Ojha engages in a routine of austerities and intensified worship of his chosen deity, which eventually results in a sign of the deity's presence, protection and willingness to cooperate with him in his professional activities. When this is accomplished, it is said that the "shadow of the Goddess" has come over him (devī kī chāyā ho gayā). This contact and partnership is thereafter maintained and renewed by periodic worship and pilgrimage, generally on one or both the the Nav Ratras (Ashvin Sh. 1-9; Chaitra Sh. 1-9)--the two nine-day periods special

to goddess worship--or through an extended term of fasting, devotion and service undertaken every three years (trivarṣ or triārsī denā). The centrality of the darker side of the Devi is consistent with the ´tantric´ nature of ojhāī,[3] but is also a legitimate response to the conspicuousness of forms of the goddess in the etiology of illness. An ongoing relationship with the Goddess facilitates the Ojha´s attempts to cool her anger and respectfully request her departure from a village or the body of a patient.

The importance of the Goddess to ojhāī does not exclude the equal prominence of masculine deities in the Ojha´s working pantheon. Because the general principle adheres that powerful members of a class of beings are called upon to deal with lesser examples of their own kind, the Ojha must have a working relationship with a variety of deities and spirits. In the course of one healing session, an Ojha may call upon Brahms, Bhairavas, Shahids, Pirs, Birs, Devis, Maris, Bhavanis and other deified dead in order to enhance his control of their underlings in the spirit world. The Ojha may also have a male helping deity which he refers to and addresses as his "Baba." Local and regional Birs very often fill this function. The Ojha´s personal deity is an essential tool of his exorcism, and may "come" to or

possess the healer during a curing session. What sets the Ojha apart from other upper caste or upwardly mobile practitioners is this very use of possession in the healing process. There is no single word for ´possession´ in the Hindi language. In the vocabulary of "ghost affliction" (bhūt bādhā, pret or pretī bādhā), the ghosts or spirits "attach" themselves to their victims (bhūt lagnā), or are said to "catch" the victim (pakaṛnā); making a ´possessed´ person one who is "caught" or "held" by a ghost (bhūt pakaṛe hue or bhūt lage hue). But when an individual desires possession and invites the deity, it is said to "come" (ānā), or its "riding comes" (sawārī ānā), or the "shadow" (sponsorship and protection) of the deity is upon a person (chāyā ho jānā). In order to heal a patient (marīz, rogī: a sick or diseased person; dukhī: an ill or troubled person) it is often necessary for an Ojha to force the ghost possessing a victim to show itself. He must "make it speak" (kahalānā, vāk nikālnā), or "cause it to play" in the patient´s body (khilānā). When the ghost will manifest itself, reveal its type and origin, make demands and have its fun with the patient´s body and voice, then it is easier to cajole, propitiate, and ultimately remove. In order to make a ghost cooperate, the Ojha may resort to the authority of his own "Baba"--

whom he invites to take possession of his body--resulting in a spirited dialogue between this deity and the patient's ghost. Or the ghost will be tricked into leaving a patient: it is promised a new and better vehicle, but is deposited in the care of a more powerful deity at a temple that specializes in exorcism. But often the Ojha simply "transfers" the ghost (bhūt lagānā, bhūt caṛhā denā, lit. "causes the ghost to be attached or mounted upon") to another person, either directly by touching a stranger in a crowded bazaar or fair ground with a ghost-filled object (a clove, etc,), or leaving the object and other ritual paraphernalia at a crossroads or thoroughfare where the ghost will be picked up by an unsuspecting victim.[4] In either case, the Ojha's ability to perform his work successfully is linked to the reputation and authority of his helping deity and the strength of the relationship between the healer and his god. Whether the Ojha asks this deity to enter him during a session is a matter of personal style and technique; the deity's power is nonetheless available to him, and is focused by him upon the task at hand. If an Ojha claims that the services of a very powerful and well-known Bir are at his command, then he must support this claim with equivalent results. These Bir familiars must be cultivated in much the same way as

the Goddess if they are to cooperate with the Ojha in his work. After an initial period of sādhana centered upon the Bir, the Ojha must continue to visit this deity's shrine at regular intervals--on Nav Ratra or the Bir's Mela--so that he is assured of continued support. Most Ojhas worship their Birs with offerings of liquor (śarāb, dārū), cannabis (gānjā) or hashish (caras) burned in a clay chillum, and actual or simulated blood sacrifice. These offerings are considered appropriate to the nature of the Bir, and it is through this "tantric procedure" (tantrik paddhati) that worship of the Bir yields the most immediate results. Healers who have taken local Birs as personal helping deities may act as the caretakers or priests of their shrines, but this does not occur in every case. Often an Ojha has as his familiar a Bir whose temple lies many hours from his home village, and has no special connection with the temple except an understanding with a particular temple priest.

In addition to the Ojha's use of a Bir as his "Baba," he must propitiate the Dih that is the guardian of the area in which he intends to carry out his work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, most of the Dih Babas in the villages surrounding Banaras are said to be Birs. Without the permission and the assistance of this

deity the Ojha cannot be successful. An Ojha must first worship his own Dih--the guardian of the city neighborhood or village in which he resides--before undertaking any program of exorcism, ghost transferal, or more aggressive, assaultive ´magic´ or sorcery at the behest of his clients. This is done in order to secure the Dih´s "permission" (āgyā) to undertake a certain task, as well as the deity´s cooperation in the endeavor. If some sign of the Dih´s favor or assent is withheld, the Ojha may persist with more elaborate offerings or resort to a more powerful Dih of wider and more inclusive authority. If an Ojha is transferring a ghost from one village to another not his own, he must secure the help of the Dih of the second village. Below is a description of this latter activity, given by a village Ojha whose "Baba" is Kedariya Bir, one of the most powerful Bir Babas in the region, located near the city of Jaunpur.[5]

> If something becomes attached to you at your inlaw´s village (sasurāl), then you must send it back again. You take monkey bones, camel bones, vulture bones, snake bones; you capture the ghost and bury it with these things with the Dih of that village. You say, "Take this Maharaj! I am burying this here. Now, from today on, no bad things will come." And he will stop them. But you have to give life, you have to give nutmeg, a flower garland, a cock and other things. And you say, "Take this Maharaj! I am giving these things to you. Do not let it return and come to my

> village. I have given everything to you. Now it will stay here." Then you offer blood, you sacrifice a pigeon, and send the ghost back to whomever sent it. You offer liquor, filling a cup or dripping it from your hand. To Lahura Bir, Kedariya Bir--whichever Dih you are sending the ghost--to him you offer these things. You offer it in the name of the Dih. You do a fire offering (havan) and say, "Take this Maharaj! From this moment, from today, from this part of the day (pahar); for seven lifetimes (sātjanam), for seven ages (sātyūg), may it not return to this body, may the trouble (dukh) be broken."

Some of the Bir Babas in the region have acquired reputations that extend well beyond their immediate territories. These Birs draw thousands of pilgrims during their Melas from a region of several hundred miles or more. Much of the attraction of these deities stems from their fame as powerful bhūt nāth, "Lords of Ghosts" or "Masters of Spirits" with a particular ability to control difficult ghosts and other malicious influences and facilitate their removal. A greater power is believed to exist at these sites to force a recalcitrant spirit to reveal itself, and to bind it--if necessary--to the location of the shrine. Some informants talk about the authority of the Bhut Nath as though he were a judge before whom all must be revealed, and before whom complicated cases of spirit assault and counter-assault may be argued to satisfactory conclusions. For this reason it is not necessary to be

accompanied by a professional exorcist to the site, as the deity replaces the healer in this role. Yet Ojhas do bring patients whose cure they have found elusive in other settings, and they come alone to pay their respects to the Bir and to perform rituals for the maintenance and renewal of their power.

From the foregoing we see that the Birs are important to several aspects of the work of the Ojha: they are among the local deities called upon as a class to assist in exorcism and healing, are valued as agressive and effective personal helping deities, are propitiated as Dih Babas who permit and facilitate ritual action within their domains, and are resorted to as Bhut Naths. The Birs are not, however, totally unique in these roles, but share some of them with other local deities, especially the powerful dead. In view of this, we must broaden our focus to examine something of the cults and oral traditions of other classes of deified dead worshipped in the Banaras area.

NOTES

1.5 THE EXORCIST, EXORCISM AND THE BIR

[1] The other terms used somewhat less frequently to describe this type of practitioner are sokhā and guṇī. Those familiar with all three titles use them to distinguish an increasing degree of mastery over the art of exorcism, and thereby power to attain one´s ends. For example, an Ojha would be an illiterate, low caste man who knew a few spells and basically relied upon ´possession´ in exorcism; a Sokha (whose corresponding activity is called sokhāī or sokhetī)--perhaps from a higher caste--would not become ´possessed´ himself, but would rely upon powerful mantras to do his work. A Guni might be an adept with an even wider and more detailed knowledge of ritual and mantras. But these distinctions do not always bear out in reality, and the terms are often used as expressions of self-promotion and the corresponding denigration of another healer. The combination "Ojha-Sokha" is also frequently used, equating the two titles.

[2] I am making a distinction here between the nature of the pantheon and ideas about human-spirit interaction that exist in the countryside, and those of literate urbanites whose views are informed and augmented by a variety of other traditional and modern sources. Many educated residents of Varanasi will talk in disparaging terms of the naive beliefs of the village folk and the fraudulent (ḍhong) work of the Ojha, but few will dismiss altogether the existence of spirits and the means available to deal with them. Almost everyone has a ghost story to tell, and enthusiasm for this subject has been encouraged in no small way by contemporary Western attention to things occult. There is a resurgence of interest among the Indian middle class in tantric methods and symbols, especially those of the so called vāmamārga ("left-handed path"). This parallels the growth in popularity of charismatic guru figures who profess to be adepts in this practice. The ideas concerning this "left-handed" tantra are linked in the popular imagination with ghosts and all sinister forms of magic and "sorcery" (jādū-ṭonā). Special "tantric" issues of popular magazines will be filled with ghosts

stories and tales of ritual murder and consorting with corpses at the cremation ground. Somewhat distinct from these notions are the explanations of Brahman pandits which have some basis in Sanskrit literature, and psychological interpretations that view ghosts as the objectification of fear and other internal states. All of this contrasts with what I understand of the rural pantheon and the nature of human-spirit interaction, detailed in this and the following chapters. While members of the upper castes denied any involvement with the deities, beliefs and practices of the lower castes, there is a certain degree of reconciliation if not covert participation. Upper caste women not infrequently involve their families in possession activity and pilgrimage trips to powerful regional ´non-Sanskritic´ deities.

3 Ojhāī is understood to be a tantric practice because it makes use of some of the general vocabulary and conceptual orientations of the vāmacārā aspects of Shakta Tantra. For instance, Ojhas worship forms of the Goddess, are given mantras by a guru, acquire powers through sādhana, and offer blood sacrifice, liquor and cannabis to their gods. But these practices bear only superficial resemblance to the elaborate theology and formal ritual of the Shakta Tantras. While many Ojhas look to Kamakhya Devi in Assam (one of the Shakta Pithas: the location of the Goddess´ yoni) as the center of tantric goddess worship, the forms of the Devi they personally control are local manifestations. The Ojha´s mantra is little more than an invocation of a list of powerful beings in order to enlist their help with his healing. Animal sacrifice, liquor and cannabis are appropriate offerings to their deities, who enjoy and demand these things. It is really more correct to say that ojhāī is a part of what is commonly known as tantra-mantra, a more generalized and popular notion of the practice as found in the āgamas, and a considerable reduction of Shakta cosmology.

4 The reason given for this practice is that one cannot be certain if a ghost will remain at a specific location; better to transfer it to another vehicle in order to prevent it from returning. This aspect of ojhāī is one of the reasons why Ojhas are considered with such deep ambivalence, if not open hostility, even by their own caste and village members. As one informant expressed it, "They remove one [ghost] and give back four" (ek haṭāegā, cār lagāegā).

[5] Personal interview with Sokha Bagesar of Soyepur village on November 30, 1980.

PART 2

THE BIR AND THE RURAL PANTHEON: THE DEIFIED DEAD

2.1 The Rural Pantheon: Two Mantras

We have noticed that the Bir Babas share certain characteristics with other "folk" or "village deities" (gram devata) and to some extent are interchangeable in specific roles and functions with these deities, such as Dih Baba, Bhut Nath, Ojha´s familiar, etc. In view of this, it would be a valuable exercise at this point to examine other aspects of the larger pantheon in order to demonstrate more completely these commonalities and to ultimately locate the Birs within the context of this worldview. Particular attention will be given to a large group of deities which tends to be ignored or summarily dismissed in much of the literature on the Hinduism: deified ghosts, heroes and other powerful dead. The deified dead make up large percentage of the rural pantheon and an equal portion of village shrines. Much of the ritual energy of the village resident is directed toward these local gods.

Some of the fullest illustrations of the composition of the rural pantheon in the Banaras area

are found in the _mantra_s of village Ojhas. While certain elements of these catalogues may be the unique creations of a healer or his predecessors, many or most are local and regional gods recognized by the general population. These lists represent a more complete picture of the rural pantheon than would, for instance, a survey of village temples, because they include figures that have no specific temple locations as well as distant regional shrines that are no less a part of a villager´s sacred geography. One should not be surprised that an Ojha is in possession of such an extensive list. His profession requires an unusual degree of mobility--not only among the villages of clients and their relations, but as a regular pilgrim to numerous temple sites--and makes necessary a working relationship with a large number and variety of deities. The Ojha, moreover, plays no small role in maintaining an awareness of these deities among the general population, and facilitates and encourages pilgrimage to their shrines. One might find the preponderance of the powerful dead in the Mantras a function of _ojhāī_ (the practice of exorcism and healing of the Ojha) rather than representative of an average person´s pantheon, but even the most casual acquaintance with rural religious activity reveals the importance of these beings to

everyday village life. In fact, the most obvious and numerous village shrines are the sthān of Bir, Brahm, Sati, Mari, Bhavani and the graves of Muslim dead.

The Mantras

As we have previously mentioned, an Ojha performs his healing and exorcistic work with the aid of his personal helping deities and by the power of one or more Mantras (ham mantra dwārā kām karte hain/ "I work through the agency of a mantra"). The Ojha claims that his Mantra is given by a Guru (not infrequently his father), who initiates him into its use at a ritually appropriate time and place. He is instructed to "repeat the Mantra" (mantra jāpnā) for a certain period of time in order to "awaken" (mantra jagānā) or "perfect" it (mantra siddh karnā) in conjunction with various other ritual and ascetic observances. As the Ojha associated with his iṣṭadevatā in matters of power and authority, so too is the practitioner identified with his Mantra. Both the healer and Mantra are said to be siddh at the culmination of sādhana: "accomplished, perfected, endowed with supernatural powers," protecting the Ojha from the dangers and master over the forces encountered in his line of work.

This explanation of the acquisition, empowerment,

and use of a Mantra is one that is informed by tantric ideas which tend to de-emphasize meaningful content in favor of the sheer efficacy of utterance and repetition. Even though most Ojhas profess this view of a Mantra's power, an examination of the following chants reveals that they are neither unintelligible syllables nor coded abstractions, but are elaborate lists of deities, both local and recognizably "pan-Indian" or "Sanskritic." While there is a sense that these utterances act to bind the deities named therein to the purposes of the Ojha, the Mantras are primarily evocations: they call upon the gods to be present, praise them in order to gain their favor, and request their aid with the problem at hand.

What follows are two Mantras given by healers--both of the Chamar jāti--living in widely-separated villages outside Varanasi. The first has been in its owner's family for several generations, and was repeated by him continuously for 7 months and 27 days until the "shadow" (chāyā) of the gods came upon him. As we will see from the type of deities contained in the Mantra, this healer is primarily a devotee of the Goddess. The second belongs to an Ojha who claims Kedariya Bir as his "iṣṭ" or "Baba." The recitation of the second Mantra is interspersed with the spoken explanations of the Ojha. Both chants are excellent illustrations of the breadth

and character of the pantheon relevant to _ojhāī_ and of the rural population in general.

Mantra #1

1 Mother Supreme Light Paramesari, Bhawani Devi,
2 Niranjan Sankar, Brahma, Visnu, Sis, Mahes, Ganes,
3 By the power of the town of Kavaru,
by the power of the Sun,
4 Uttari Baba, Mother Ganga, Hanumanji,
5 Dih, Sayar,
6 Time Devi, Birtiya Devi, Vamat Devi, Kali Devi,
Sitala Devi,
7 Kakari Devi, Malat Devi, Ramwai Devi, Varan Devi,
8 Kamaru Kamakhya Hiriya Devi, Jiriya Devi,
9 Patal Devi, Jagat Devi, Akas Kamani Devi,
10 Heart Fail Devi, Devi of the Wind, Foreign Devi,
Indra Devi,
11 Satnam Baba, Baur Hawa Devi, Samar Dhir, Narsinha
Kalla,
12 Gairiya Baksar Guna ke Teliya Masan,
13 Harasu Brahm, Dipau Brahm, Dhat Dhat Antaryami
Brahm, Kaihasi Baram,
14 By the power of Allah
15 By the power of Aughar, Aughari, Subahan,
16 Ajab Salar Gauri, Muhammad,
17 By the power of the wife of Lakhan Kuwar,
Amina Sati,
18 Saphau Dih ...

19 Be bound to your seat, bound to your seat!
20 Fix your body to 1 1/4 hands of earth,
21 Your body ...

22 Praise to Niranjan, praise to Brahma, praise to
Visnu,
23 Praise to Ses, praise to Mahes, praise to Ganes,
24 By the power of the town of Kavaru,
25 By the power of the Dih,
26 Praise to the Sun, praise to the Moon,
27 Praise to Bhairo Nath, Kal Bhairo,
28 By the power of Jalpa Devi, Gaura Parbati,
Nona Camain,
29 By the power of Kamaru Hiriya, Praise to Satya
Hiriya,
30 Durga, Sitala, Kedariya Bir,
31 Sankar Bhagwan, Sursati,
32 Laksmi, Visnu, Brahma, Nirankar Bhagwan.

Transcription of Hindi/Bhojpuri Mantra #1

1 māī param jot paramesarī, bhawānī devī,
2 niranjan sankar, brahmā, visnu, sis, mahes, ganes,
3 kavarū nagar ke dwārā, sūraj ke dwārā,[1]
4 uttarī bābā, mātā gangā, hanumānjī,
5 ḍīh, sāyar,
6 samay devī, bīrtīyā devī, vamat devī, kālī devī, sītalā devī,
7 kakarī devī, mālat devī, ramwaī devī, varan devī,
8 kamarū kamākhyā hirīyā devī, jirīyā devī,
9 patāl devī, jagat devī, ākās kāmanī devī,
10 hārṭ fel devī, hawā ke devī, farang devī, indrā devī,
11 satnām bābā, baur hawā devī, samar dhīr, narsinha kallā,
12 gairīyā baksar gunā ke telīyā masān,
13 harasū brahm, dīpaū brahm, dhaṭ dhaṭ antaryāmī brahm, kaihāsī brahm,
14 ilāhe ke dwārā,
15 aughaṛ ke dwārā, aughaṛī ke dwārā, subahān dwārā,
16 ajab salār gaurī, muhammad,
17 lakhan kuwar patni dwāra, aminā satī,
18 saphau ḍīh ...

19 āsan bādho, ḍāsan bādho,
20 āpan kāyā sawā hāth ke dhartī bādho,
21 āp kāyā ...

22 niranjan ke dohāī, brahm ke dohāī, visnu ke dohāī,[2]
23 ses ke dohāī, mahes ke dohāī, ganes ke dohāī,
24 kavarū nagar ke dwārā,
25 ḍīh ke dwārā,
26 suraj ke dohāī, cānd ke dohāī,
27 bhairo nāth kī dohāī, kāl bhairo,
28 jālpā devī ke dwārā, gaurā pārbatī, nonā camāī ke dwārā,
29 kamarū hiriyā ke dwārā, satya hiriyā ke dohāī,
30 durgā, sītalā, kedāriyā bīr,
31 sankar bhagwān, sursatī,
32 laksmī, visnu, brahmā, nirankār bhagwān.

Mantra #2

1 Bhagwanji, Visnuji, Hanuman Swami, Guru Maharaj
2 Satyanarayan Swami, Thakurji Maharaj ... my respect is in your hands.
3 Look! Be there any *bhūt*, *pret*, *caṇḍāl*[3] ... whatever may be in the [patient's] body, catch it and bring it!

4 [SPOKEN] Through these Muslim deities, Muslim "things" are caught:

5 Gazi Miyan, Panchon Pir, Amnas Pir, Alam Pir,
6 Balam Pir, Baba Garan Kotwal, Chandan Sahid,
7 Bahadur Sahid, Makdum Sahid, Sai Baba, Kamal Baba ... a hundred thousand supplications!

8 [SPOKEN] Then, after this, Bhagauti ... [4]

9 Param Jot Paramesari Devi ... be there any *bhūt*, *pret*, *cor*, *caṇḍāl*, catch it and bring it here!

10 Maruka Mai, look! Be there any *bhūt*, *betāl*, *cor*, *caṇḍāl*, *marī*, *masān* ... from the house, from nearby, from here or there. Whatever thing exists--*bhawānī* trouble--capture it and destroy it!

11 Sitala Mai, Sangatha Mai, Durga Mai, Kali Mai,
12 Vindhycali Vindhyavasini Devi, Astabhuja Devi,
13 Haital Devi, Tan Devi, Katyani Devi,

14 Baraki Mata, Garlo Mata, Dulari Mata, Paddmo Mata,
15 Dakini Mata,

16 Seven Sisters Bhawani, Seven Sahid, Seven Betal,
17 Seven Pathan, Seven Jinnath, Seven Mari,
18 Seven Jalaid, Seven Witches, Seven Nari ... be there seven hundred and seven *dait*, capture them and bring them!

19 [SPOKEN] If the *marī* won't obey, if it won't be caught, you may control the Mari like this ...

20 Kamaru and Ajmer Mari, High Court Mari,
21 Mirath Mari, Jalawa Mari, Hari Ban Mari,
22 Basti Ghar Mari, Chanarauti Fort Mari, Gate Mari,
23 Janda Mari, Amkas Mari, Numberless Mari,
24 Howrah Bridge Mari, Court House Mari,
25 Jail House Mari, Chauka Ghat Mari, Nakhi Ghat Mari,
26 Old Bridge Mari, Malviya [Bridge] Mari ... be there *marī, marāyal* in the house, from outside, from here or there ... capture them and bring them!

27 [SPOKEN] After this is Kedariya Bir, the god who is my own true *guru*. He lives in Jaunpur District on the bank of the Gaumti River.

28 Kedariya Bir Maharaj, be there any cause of suffering, any *bhūt-betāl* in the house, nearby, here or there--please have it captured.

29 Babu Kedariya Bir, Uday Bir, Mangalaha Bir,
30 Koyala Bir, Daitra Bir, Siha Bir, Karman Bir,
31 Banas Bir, Jogi Bir, Joga bir, Chatariya Bir,
32 Savati-Vindhyavati Bir, Khabaran Bir, Dyorhiya Bir,
33 Dana Bir, Putua Bir, Banu Bir, Ajori Bir,

34 Lanka Dait, Sivalaya Dait, Joharbair Dait,
35 Icchana Dait, Palm Tree Dait, Pipal Tree Dait,
36 Babul Tree Dait, Dhandhera Dait ...

37 [SPOKEN] By the power of these *daits*, whatever *daits* exist will be caught.

38 Kal Bhairo, Bhuni Bhero, Bhairo Nath,
39 Pisach Bir, Lauhara Bir, Panniya Pandal Bir,
40 Chhatariya Bir, Bhagod Bir, Gauhra Bir,
41 Five Pandavas, Satyanarayan,

42 Harasu Brahm, Koleswar Brahm, Himal Brahm,
43 Hari Brahm, Hathi Brahm, Hayeram Brahm,
44 Maniya Brahm ... my brothers, our village *brahm*, a hundred-thousand supplications!

45 Babu Diha Hira Bir ... be there any *bhūt*, *paharāt*, *cor*, *caṇḍāl*, *marī*, *masān* ... you should capture them and take them away!

46 Mai Sayari Mai, Chaura Mai,
47 Akas Kamani, Mohini Bamti, the *bāmtī* who are the eaters of blood offerings,
48 Kali Khoh, Balua Ghat Aughar Nath,
49 Manikarnika Ghat Masan, Babua Bir Masan,
50 Mahokar Nat, Rupane Nat,
51 Baruwa Domin, Nona Camain ...

52 [SPOKEN] ... those things that remain may be captured from the body of a sick person by reading this *mantra*.

Transcription of Hindi/Bhojpuri Mantra #2

1 bhagwānjī, visnujī, hanumān swāmī, guru maharāj
2 satyanārāyan swāmī, ṭhakurjī maharāj ... izzat
tore hāthe/
3 dekhā! koī bhūt ho, caṇḍāl ... is ke dehan ho jo
phalāne ke dehan, wo pakṛ le āo/

4 [SPOKEN] itane musalmānī devatā se, musalmānī cīz
pakaṛe jālā/

5 ġāzī miyā̃, pā̃cõ pīr, āmnās pīr, ālam pīr,
6 bālam pīr, bābā gaṛān kotwāl, candan sahīd
7 bahādur sahīd, makdūm sahīd, sāī̃ bābā, kamal bābā
kī lākh duhāī/

8 [SPOKEN] phir okare bād, bhagautī ...

9 param jot paramesarī devī ... koī bhūt ho, pret ho,
cor ho, caṇḍāl ho, us ko pakṛle āo/

10 mārūkā māī ke dekh, koī bhūt ho, betāl, cor ho,
caṇḍāl ho, marī ho, masān ho ... ghar se, pās
se, aṛerī-baṛerī ko, koī cīz ho, bhawānī grah
ho, us ko pakṛ kar ke mār pāo/

11 sītalā māī, sangaṭhā māī, durgā māī, kālī māī,
12 vindhyacalī vindhyavāsinī, aṣṭabūjā devī,
13 haitāl devī, tan devī, kātyānī devī,

14 baṛakī mātā, garlo mātā, dulārī mātā, paddmo mātā,
15 dakinī mātā,

16 sātõ bahan bhawānī, sātõ sahīd, sātõ betāl,
17 sātõ paṭhān, sātõ jinnāth, sātõ marī,
18 sātõ jalāīd, sātõ ḍāin, sāt narī ... sāt ke sāt sau
daitan ho, us ko giraftār kar ke le āo/

19 [SPOKEN] na marī mānat rahal, na marī pakaṛāt rahī,
to marī pāl aise ho ki ...

20 kāmarū, ajmer kī marī, hāī kort kī marī,
21 mirath kī marī, jalāwā kī marī, harī bān kī marī,
22 bastī ghar kī marī, canarautī kilā kī marī, phāṭak kī marī,
23 jandā kī marī, āmkās kī marī, guṇā-guṇā kī marī,
24 hāwaṛā pul kī marī, kacaharī kī marī,
25 jailkhāne kī marī, caukā ghāṭ kī marī, nākhī ghāṭ kī marī,
26 purāne pul kī marī, mālvīya kī marī ... marī ho, marāyal ho, ghar se, bahar se, aṛerī-baṛerī ko, giraftār pakṛ le āo/

27 [SPOKEN] ekare bād, kedāriyā bīr guruāsanī devatā hamar jo hoū aslī, jaunpur jila rahalan, gaumtī kā kachār par/

28 kedāriyā bīr maharāj, koī dukhī cīz ho, koī bhūt ho, betāl ho, ghar se, pās se, aṛerī-baṛerī ko, us ko giraftār karā dẽ/

29 bābū kedāriyā bīr, udāy bīr, mangalahā bīr,
30 koyalā bīr, daitrā bīr, sīhā bīr, karman bīr,
31 bānas bīr, jogī bīr, jogā bīr, chatariyā bīr,
32 savātī-vindhyāvātī bīr, khabaraṇ bīr, ḍyoṛhiyā bīr,
33 dāṇā bīr, puṭuā bīr, bāṇū bīr, ajorī bīr,

34 gamarī mẽ lankā dait, sivālaya dait, joharbaiṛ dait,
35 īcchanā ke dait, tāṛe dait, pīpare dait,
36 babulī dait, dhandherā ke dait ...

37 [SPOKEN] e daitan ke ethuwāī, daitan kaisanõ rahe, pakṛ liyābe sab/

38 kāl bhairo, bhūnī bhairo, bhairo nāth,
39 pisāc bīr, lauharā bīr, panniyā pandāl ke bīr,
40 chatariyā ke bīr, bhagod bīr, gauhrā bīr,
41 pā̃cõ panḍavā, satyanārāyan,

42 harasū brahm, koleswar brahm, himal brahm,
43 harī brahm, haṭhī brahm, hayerām brahm,
44 maniya brahm̄ ... bābū mere bhaiyā hamāre gau ke brahm ke lākh duhāī/

45 bābū ḍīhā hīrā bīr ... koī bhūt ho, paharāt ho, cor ho, caṇḍāl ho, marī ho, masān ho ... barābar se, ek dam giraphtār kar lenā cāhiye/

46 māī sāyarī māī, caurā māī,
47 ākās kāmanī mohinī bāmtī, khūn ke pūja khāne wālī bāmtī,
48 kālī khoh ke, baluā ghāṭ ke aughaṛ nāth,
49 manikārnikā ghāṭ ke masān, babuā bīr ke masān,
50 mahokār kā naṭ, rūpane ke naṭ,
51 baruwā ke ḍomin, nonā camāī ...

52 [SPOKEN] ... jo cīz milat rahe, rogī ke dehan se, ehī mantra se, paṛh ke, sab pakṛ liyābe/

Both of the Mantras begin with a recitation of the names of recognizably ´Sanskritic´ gods, and then proceed somewhat unsystematically through the different classes of powerful beings called upon to drive the disturbing influences from the body of the Ojha´s patient. Both Mantras include (1) gods having specific tomb or temple sites, (2) deities inhabiting no single or particular location, but who are generally recognized and worshipped, and (3) those whose identities have essentially been forgotten, yet retain their place in the memorized chant. The names of the latter figures are more susceptible to alteration as the Mantra is repeated and passed down from healer to healer.

The first Mantra is less elaborate in its delineation of the various types of deities, and returns quickly to a refrain at the end. Fitting with the healer´s identity as a Devi worshipper, the list of goddesses is the most extensive. The town of "Kavaru" or "Kamaru" is that of Kamarup Kamakhya in eastern Assam, the site of the goddess Kamakshi Devi, one of the Shakti Pithas and the primary center of left-handed tantric practice according to Varanasi Ojhas and Tantrics. The village guardian pair is mentioned generically (Dih, Sayar), and notable is the inclusion of Muslim ´gods´ Allah and Muhammad. The greater

portion of the remaining deities are powerful ghosts or deified dead: Ajab Salar Gauri, Amina Sati, Kedariya Bir, Nona Camain, a Masan (ghost of the cremation ground) who was a Teli (Oil-Presser) from the town of Baksar, and various Brahms (the ghosts of dead Brahmans). Most of these figures will be discussed at greater length in the following pages.

Using this and the more elaborate second Mantra as our starting points, we will examine the major classes of deified dead represented therein. In an attempt to supplement the explanations of informants about these deities--extremely minimal in some cases--I have made extensive use of secondary sources in order to give a fuller rendering of what is known of their history and oral traditions.

NOTES

2.1 THE RURAL PANTHEON: TWO MANTRAS

[1] The words _ke dwārā_ mean literally "by, through, through the agency/medium of." M. Chaturvedi, B.N. Tiwari, eds., _A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary_, 6th ed. (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1980), p. 333.

[2] The words _kī/ke dohāī_ are the Hindi _duhāī_ (nf), "an outcry or entreaty for help ..." [Chaturvedi and Tiwari, _Practical_, p. 325], or "to appeal in the name of, proclaim the praise of."

[3] _Caṇḍāl_, _betāl_, _cor_, _marī_, _marāyal_, _masān_, _bhavānī_, _ḍait_, etc., are here names for different types of powerful or dangerous ghosts. A _caṇḍāl_ is a term for a low, despised caste, but here used for a low species of ghost; _betāl_ is Sanskirt _vetāla_; _cor_, literally a "thief," is a thieving ghost; _marī_, _marāyal_, _masān_, _ḍait_, etc. will be explained below.

[4] Bhagauti or Bhagavati is here used as a general name for the listed goddesses and female spirits.

2.2 Deified Spirits of Women

> Seven Sisters Bhawani, Seven Mari, Seven Witches
>
> Kamaru and Ajmer Maris, High Court Mari, Mirath Mari, Jalawa Mari, Janda Mari, Amkas Mari, Numberless Mari, Howrah Bridge Mari, Court House Mari, Jail House Mari, Chauka Ghat Mari, Nakhi Ghat Mari, Old Bridge Mari, Malviya [Bridge] Mari ... be there *marī*, *marāyal* in the house, from outside, from here or there, capture them and bring them!
>
> Baruwa Domin, Nona Chamain
>
> Amina Sati

In the second Mantra we find a presentation of Bhagauti or Bhagawati--a cover term for the many manifestations of the Goddess--that may be divided roughly into three classes: (1) the major forms of Shakti of pan-Indian or regional fame: Durga Mai, Kali Mai, Maruka Mai, Vindhyacali Vindhyavasini Devi, etc., (2) Sitala and the other Matas--the goddesses of disease, and (3) the deified spirits of women: *marī*, *bhavānī*, *ḍāin*, etc. We will mainly be concerned here with the last category, the deified spirits of women, but the presentation will hopefully communicate a sense of the fluidity among these hypothetical ´levels:´ the disease goddesses and deified dead substitute for each other in the function of village, caste, family or personal deities; local manifestations rise to regional

importance; regional deities become identified with pan-Indian goddesses.

Mari/Bhavani

The second Mantra speaks of "Bhavani trouble" and of the Seven Sisters Bhavani." There are Bhavanis who bother people, and Bhavanis who may be called upon to help with this intrusion. In Planalp's discussion of these deities, he describes them as the family goddesses of most of Senapur's lower castes. In some instances they are also village goddesses. He reports that "the family Bhavani is usually represented by a small mound or altar of clay inside the house [and] acts as a guardian and protectress of the family members as long as she is regularly propitiated."[1] During special ceremonies for this deity, the Bhavani is urged to possess certain family members who then speak as her oracles. On these occasions she may be served by a village Ojha and be offered animal sacrifice." Planalp describes the Bhavanis' origins:[2]

> It is probable that most or all Bhavanis were originally malevolent ghosts, before subsequent elevation through worship and propitiation to the status of tutelary deities. More specifically, _bhavanis_ are the ghosts of girls, especially those killed by a _bhut_, or in some other unusual manner. It is generally agreed that the spirits of the victim of female infanticide also become _bhavanis_. ... after the _bhavani_ gives

> continuous evidence of its activity in haunting a family by causing sickness and other troubles, and is then propitiated and regularly worshiped, it often becomes a Bhavani, or family goddess. As such, it is no longer malevolent toward the family, and it may even begin to exert protective influence.

If there is a point at which we might say that the ´deification´ of a ghost has taken place, this process is certainly begun with the establishment of a shrine and the onset of regular worship. But by "deification" (Planalp indicates this transition by writing bhavani as Bhavani) it is not meant that the being is transformed into a wholly benevolent deity. Those inside and outside the tradition recognize the continued ambivalence of this type of goddess, who alternately helps, withholds help, or visits vengeance upon her worshippers. There is the hope and expectation that the enshrined Bhavani will focus her powers in a kindly manner upon her people, but conscious or unconscious neglect will invariably bring trouble.

In Banaras, the beings called both Bhavani and Mari are described as the ghosts of aborted or stillborn female fetuses, female victims of infanticide, or any young girl who dies in an unusual manner. The term Mari (and Marayal) is derived from the Hindi verb marnā, "to die," and may perhaps be glossed as "dead one." This writer´s data is insufficient on the current popularity

of household worship of these deities (even in Planalp's time, he noticed a steady decline), but it was noted that there are Mari/Bhavani shrines scattered throughout the villages which are propitiated by individuals in times of hardship. These shrines (sthān), like the memorials of Satis, are always potential candidates for elevation to village guardian status, or even eventual identification with pan-Indian goddess figures.

More frequently, one hears of deified Mari as the guardians of particular structures, having been sacrificed--perhaps buried alive in the foundation--so that the construction might proceed unhindered. This type of story is very common, and usually begins with a description of the builder's initial inability to stabilize a wall or foundation due to witchcraft or other supernatural interference. A human sacrifice is then required to placate the forces disturbed by the building and to bind the ghost of the victim to the success of the project and protection of the structure. This is the most probable explanation of the Mantra's High Court Mari, Chanarauti Fort Mari, Gate Mari, Howrah Bridge Mari, Court House Mari, Jail House Mari, Chauka Ghat Mari, Nakhi Ghat Mari, Old Bridge Mari, and Malviya Mari.

Dain ('Witches')

The Mantras also exhibit a general preoccupation with the ghosts of certain low castes--especially the Teli (Oil Presser), Chamar (Leather Worker), Dom (Cremation Ground Attendant), Dhobi (Washerman), and Nat (Nomadic Performer and Acrobat)--believed to be particularly dangerous, difficult and intrinsically powerful. The lowest castes have always been identified with magical practice and the spirit world, not only because they engage in these activities, but because that are perceived to have a more direct and natural connection with and knowledge of this shadowy world. It is possible that some of these castes have aboriginal roots, reinforcing the idea of their basic marginality and association with the untamed wilderness and its ghostly beings. A Teli or Dhobi skull is frequently used in tantric ritual; the ghost of a Nat (Mantra 2: Mahokar Nat, Rupane Nat) is reputed to be one of the most difficult to remove; the ghosts of the graveyard--collectively called Masan--are said to be "low caste" (choṭī jāti); women of the lowest castes are often reputed to be the most skillful and dangerous 'witches' (Mantra 2: Baruwa Domin, Nona Chamain). The most famous of these witches (ḍāin) in North India is Nona Chamain (Nona Chamarin, Lona Chamarin, etc.), who continues to

be invoked for help with exorcism, illness, childbirth and snakebite.

There are many versions of the Nona Chamain story told over most of Northern India. Crooke supplies this rendering of how she obtained her powers.[3]

> It is said that Dhanwantari, the physician of the gods, ... was bitten by Takshaka, the snake king. On his death-bed he ordered his sons to cook and eat his corpse so that they might acquire the magical skill of their father. But the snake king dissuaded them from eating the unholy food, and advised them to let the cauldron containing it float down in the flood of the Ganges. Lona Chamarin found it stranded on the bank, and by eating the contents acquiring the magical knowledge of Dhanwantari, in particular his skill in curing snake bite.

A version of the Nona Chamain story told to this writer by a Muslim healer contains Islamic as well as tantric elements.[4]

> There was one Ismail Jogi who was a great magician (jādūgar). A disciple killed him, put his remains in a clay pot and threw it in a river. At Kamaru Kamakhya there were seven sisters, the oldest being Nona Chamari. They had been hungry for days, and made a vow that they would eat the next thing to come down the river. When the pot containing the Jogi´s remains floated by, they caught it and ate its contents. From eating the flesh of the Jogi they acquired his powers.

Interestingly enough, Nona Chamain is also known to the Gazi Miyan cycle described in the next section. In one account of the birth of the Muslim hero, she appears as an evil-intentioned midwife who is responsible for the

magical act which eventuates in Gazi Miyan's tragic, untimely death.[5] The Nona Chamain story is one, perhaps older and more widespread, example of a witch-spirit believed to inhabit a locality. Unlike the other figures under discussion, these 'witches' do not appear to have specific shrine locations, but seem to be free-floating agents of help or harm.

Satis

Almost every village in the region contains at least one small shrine to a Sati Mai, said to be a village woman of any caste who willingly burned with her husband on his funeral pyre. The Banaras area Sati memorials are identical in type to the bhūtasthān established to the unquiet dead and derivative local deities: a square or round platform surmounted by a whitewashed conical mound. We have seen that this is a multi-purpose and multifaceted symbol, for it may be regarded as a propitiatory shrine for a troublesome ghost or a memorial for a saint, ancestor, or hero. In the case of the Sati, the shrine clearly memorializes her extraordinary action of self-sacrifice. Her death, although enormously awe provoking, is not regarded as untimely, because it is the culmination of the wife's role as pativratā or patibhagat, one who is committed/

devoted to her husband as her only God. The stories told about Satis tend to exemplify the conduct of the ideal wife, or otherwise praise them as women of virtue, courage and devotion. The shrines commemorate those who dutifully followed their husbands into the world beyond, igniting the pyre with the energy of their own sat (truthfulness, chastity, virtue).

A careful catalog of the Banaras area Sati shrines and oral traditions has yet to be accomplished. My own admittedly cursory observations revealed a modest amount of ritual activity commensurate with that of most other deified figures of neighborhood and village, but an absence of shrines which drew pilgrims from a wider area. It is entirely possible that the Sati cult in this area of North India is lacking in the attention and elaboration that one finds in Rajasthan and other cultural regions of India. One reason for the Sati's relatively low profile among the other deified dead appears to be her lack of ambivalence, the sine qua non of an active local deity. She is sometimes paired with the village Dih Baba as the village Mother, but does not exhibit the ambiguous attributes of a disease goddess or deified ghost, or the capriciousness for which they are feared and cultivated with such care. The pure and uplifted character of the Sati also positions her

outside the realm of the tantric work of the Ojha. The enshrined Satis in the Banaras area are idealized, honored and revered, yet do not seem to evince the powerful ambivalence which would make them more riveting objects of devotion. They are nonetheless important and valued members of the local pantheon for the things they do symbolize. The story of Amina Sati will be discussed in the next section.

NOTES

2.2 DEIFIED SPIRITS OF WOMEN

1 Jack M. Planalp, "Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village," Diss. Cornell University 1956, p. 759.

2 Planalp, "Religious Life," pp. 756-7.

3 William Crooke, _Religion and Folklore of Northern India_ (London, 1926; rpt. Delhi: Chand & Co., 1972), p. 437.

4 Personal interview with Molavi Bismillah Khan on January 5, 1981. Crooke also mentions the name of Ismail Jogi in association with Nona Chamain (_Religion_, p. 78).

5 Richard Greeven, _North Indian Notes and Queries_ III, No. 1 (April 1893), entry 25.

2.3 Muslim Deities

> By the power of Allah
> Ajab Salar Gauri, Muhammad,
> Amina Sati
>
> Gazi Miyan, Panchon Pir
> Amnas Pir, Alam Pir, Balam Pir
> Baba Garan Kotwal
> Chandan Sahid, Bahadur Sahid, Makhdum Sahid

Few involved in the study of folk religion in North India have failed to notice the worship of Muslim saints and heroes among low caste Hindus. This has involved not only pilgrimage to the tombs of Sufi saints during their death anniversary celebrations (urs) and the fairs of Muslim martial heroes and martyrs, but the domestic worship of some of these figures with the aid of Muslim hereditary priests (described below). It was not unusual in many areas of North India during the last century for a low caste villager to identify himself as a "Panchpiriya," or a worshipper of the Panchon Pir (pā̃ñcõ pīr), the "Five (Muslim) Saints." One would not, however, necessarily identify the Panchpiriya as a Muslim, as his "saints" are assimilated into the larger ´Hindu´ pantheon as "Muslim Deities" (musalmānī devatā) along with more recognizably Hindu gods and non-Islamic deified dead. Moreover, the makeup of the Panchon Pir

did not remain stable throughout the expansion of the cult, but absorbed decidedly non-Islamic elements. In any case, rigid definitions of what it is to be ´Hindu´ and ´Muslim´ become less meaningful when we consider this grey area characterized by various syntheses of ´folk´ varieties of Hinduism and Islam. The Panchpiriya is a perfect example of a religious identification that defies such categorization.

Gazi Miyan and the Panchon Pir

The origin of the Panchpiriya cult in India is difficult to ascertain. The original grouping of five saints was most certainly the Shiite quintet of Muhammad, Fatimah, Ali, Hasan and Husain, symbolized by the hand carried in procession during Muharram. In the Panjab, where the Indian version of the cult seems to have originated, the list of the Panchon Pir consisted of prominent Sufi (mainly Chisti) saints, living in the 13th and 14th centuries.[1] As the cult spread to the south and east, there was a tendency for some of the saints to be replaced with historical or quasi-historical Islamic martial heroes--the religious warriors (<u>ġāzī</u>) or martyrs (<u>śahīd</u>) whose local cults were already established in a given region. Gazi Miyan (Mantra 2, line 5) and Ajab Salar Gauri (Mantra 1, line

16) are two such examples. The cycle of the martyr Gazi Miyan is discussed at length below; Ajab Salar Gauri being his sister´s son and the commander of his forces. Further expansion of the Panchpiriya cult--into what was then the United Provinces and W. Bengal--resulted in the progressive dilution of Islamic elements and the inclusion of purely local Hindu or ´tribal´ deities and deified dead.

Perhaps the most prominent figure associated with the Panchon Pir in the Uttar Pradesh/Bihar/Bengal area is Gazi Miyan, said to be Salar Mas´ud, the nephew of Mahmud of Ghazni. Legend has it that the hero became a martyr at the young age of nineteen when he "led an expedition into Oudh and was killed in battle at Bahraich in A.D. 1034."[2] The oral traditions concerning Salar Mas´ud or Gazi Miyan were collected several hundred years after his death in what was purported to be a historical biography--the Mir-at-i Mas´udi of ´Abdu-r Rahman Chisti (in Urdu, n.d.)--but which amounted to a romantic hagiography which played freely with historical fact, containing numerous miraculous elements.[3] There also exists a large body of folk song about the martyr and his retinue, some of which were published Greeven in 1898.[4] There is evidence in the late 13th and early 14th centuries of the great

popularity of the legends of Salar Mas´ud, and the rapid growth of the cult centered at his tomb (dargāh) in Bahraich, in what is now Uttar Pradesh. The next several centuries witnessed the expansion of the institutions surrounding the tomb, the development of a hereditary priesthood, and the elaboration and multiplication of cultic practices and oral traditions associated with the hero. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the eyewitness reports of Europeans portray the dargāh of Gazi Miyan at Bahraich as a major pilgrimage center with an annual Mela which drew 50,000 - 100,000 pilgrims--both Hindu and Muslim--from all over India. Replicas of the Bahraich tomb were to be found in other North Indian cities and towns, serving as localized centers of the cult.[5]

Certain aspects of the Gazi Miyan legend and cult clearly demonstrate the type of pre- or non-Islamic borrowing that is so common with these figures. The first is the association of Gazi Miyan with the sun or Sun God. The Mir-at-i Mas´udi describes the hero´s preoccupation, even enchantment, with a grove containing a tank and temple of the Sun where Hindus would gather in great numbers during a solar eclipse.[6] His attraction to the spot inspired him to build a garden there,[7] or according to other popular traditions, was

buried there with his head resting on the image of the sun, "the worship of which he had devoted his life to destroy."[8] The *Mir-at-i Mas´udi* states that upon his death, the "sun-like countenance became as pale as the new moon."[9] These suggestions indicate that Crooke is probably correct in viewing the absorption of sun-worship into the legends of Gazi Miyan as contributing to the general popularity of his cult and the enhancement of his reputation as a fertility deity.[10]

What appears to be a later tradition grafted onto the legend of Salar Mas´ud provided the rationale for the major public event celebrated at his Bahraich tomb and elsewhere. Schwerin describes it thus:[11]

> The healing powers of his grave must have been known among the Muslims of the region whether they were immigrants or local converts when Zohra Bibi, the unmarried and blind daughter of the merchant Syed Jamal-ud-Din of Rudauli near Lucknow, went on a pilgrimage to his grave hoping to regain her eyesight (Nevill, 1903: 149). She was cured and out of gratitude decided to construct a *dargah* on the former site of the sun temple in the village Parasi, some one-and-a-half miles outside Bahraich. Beside it, she had another grave constructed for herself. Shortly afterwards, she died, and her parents and relatives established the custom of making a pilgrimage to Bahraich in the month of *jeth* (Hindu month May/June) in order to celebrate a post-mortem wedding of the two unmarried deceased. Zohra Bibi was thus betrothed to the hero Salar Masud and the number of pilgrims began to grow.

This posthumous event seems to have been the basis of

later legends, such as one collected by Greeven,[12] which betroth Zohra or Zuhra Bibi to Gazi Miyan soon before the hour of his death, intensifying the tragedy of his martyrdom, and investing the hero with characteristics similar to those of Dulha Deo, the popular "bridegroom deity" of North and Central India.[13] Again, it is not unreasonable to assume that a pre-existing tradition such as that of Dulha Deo--who was killed by a tiger before the consummation of his marriage, becoming a protective household and village deity--was absorbed into the Gazi Miyan corpus and facilitated the adoption of the cult by the non-Muslims of the region.

Even more obvious an example of the creative blending of oral traditions is the importance of the figure of Amina Sati (Mantra 1, line 14) in the Gazi Miyan cycle. According to the oral tradition, Amina Sati became "a convert to Gazi Miyan through the growing report of his miracles."[14] She was turned out by her husband, the Raja Lorchand, after feeding the hungry Muslim saint, and lived in exile in the jungle with her two sons.[15] Amina Sati´s departure brought about the ruin of her husband´s kingdom. When he sought her forgiveness and return, the wronged women appealed to the earth to swallow her. "Immediately a crevice appeared, and she was enclosed in it. The place of her

entombment is about 14 miles from Bahraich, and pilgrims who go there also visit Amina Sati´s shrine."[16] Amina Sati is included in most lists of the Panchon Pir worshipped in the region surrounding Banaras. This is typical of the way the configuration of the quintet adjusted to embrace variant local traditions as it spread throughout the north, and is eloquent on the appeal of the Gazi Miyan legend across religious boundaries. Taken together with the Zohra Bibi story, we are given an impression of the hero/saint´s particular attraction for women, who have always constituted the majority of the pilgrims making the hopeful journey to the tombs and shrines of the powerful dead.

As we have mentioned, the principle annual celebration of Gazi Miyan is the reenactment of his truncated or posthumous wedding to Zohra Bibi which takes place on the first Sunday of the Hindu month of Jeth (May-June). Among the thousands of pilgrims are organized groups of devotees from outlying districts who converge at Bahraich carrying banners, decorated poles, and spears--symbols of the martyr. Pilgrims enact vows, pray for the intercession of the saint, and perform acts of self torture in order to prove their devotion and acquire merit. On this day local

celebrations of the wedding also take place in other North Indian towns. The two Nav Ratras are also popular periods of worship at the Bahraich tomb and elsewhere.[17]

Gazi Miyan and the Panchon Pir are also revered as village deities as are other powerful and illustrious dead. They are worshipped collectively in the form of a heap of stones or a mound outside of a village, near a tank or under a sacred tree, and perform a protective function as would other village guardians.[18]

Even more interesting are reports of the domestic worship of the Panchon Pir. From the Panjab to Bengal, writers have variously described the household shrines as consisting of (1) a small, earthen mound topped by a spear, trident, or hand-shaped piece of iron, (2) five wooden pegs, or (3) the replica of a Muslim grave or tomb. Daily, weekly, and annual worship is performed in the usual manner for household deities, often assisted by a Muslim Dafali, the hereditary priest of Gazi Miyan.[19] Planalp describes one such scene of worship in Senapur, a village situated north of Banaras:[20]

> Each Teli family had a clay altar to Ghazi Miyan inside a room of its house. The shrine was known as <u>deva khur</u> (shrine of a deity). As the family god, Ghazi Miyan was offered a large <u>puja</u> every third year at the time of Kuar Nau Rat. One of the Dafalis acted as <u>mujavar</u> ... The Telis treated their Dafali <u>mujavars</u> like Brahman, touching their feet and even calling them "Brahman" and "guru." They

> massaged and washed their Dafalis' feet, and sprinkled this water up to the shrine of Ghazi Miyan in the house.
>
> When called to officiate at a family _puja_ to Ghazi Miyan, the Dafali _mujavar_ ... drummed and sang _sohailas_, seeking to induce Ghazi Miyan to possess one of the family members. The procedure was very similar to that occurring in connection with the worship of a family Bhavani.

This domestic worship of Gazi Miyan by non-Muslims is no doubt based upon pre-existing forms of worship of non-Islamic deities. As Planalp indicates, the household worship of the Muslim saint is here structurally similar to the worship of family Bhavanis, the ghosts cum goddesses who are established as personal deities within the home (discussed in the previous section). Like the Bhavanis of in this area, Gazi Miyan is represented by a mound of earth with a flag or trident (an interesting replacement for the hand), is the recipient of a major period of worship once every three years during the Kuar Nav Ratra (the _trivarṣ_ _denā_ mentioned in the context of goddess worship in Part 1.5 above), and may be encouraged to possess family members under the direction of a special priest, in this case a Muslim Dafali. The interchangeability of these two types of deities in the role of household gods of lower caste Hindus speaks of their basic equivalence despite obvious differences. I believe that the kinship between these two deities stems

from their origin as powerful dead, the "awake" and imminent gods appropriate to microcosmic concerns. The logic of this identity is far more persuasive in the culture than one might imagine, and serves to associate seemingly disparate types of deities as personal, family or village guardians. Nowhere is the association of deified ghost, saint, hero and goddess better demonstrated than in the various aggregations of the Panchon Pir.

Planalp notes a decline among Senapur Hindus of the domestic worship of Gazi Miyan during the period of his fieldwork (1952-4), which he attributes to the influence of the Arya Samaj, and growing tensions between Hindus and Muslims brought about by partition.[21] Schwerin reports a corresponding decline in worship for the same period among Muslims, due to the increase of Islamic fundamentalist movements and attitudes.[22] The Bahraich tomb of Gazi Miyan continues to draw its quota of pilgrims, but one doubts that the numbers are equal to what was reported in earlier centuries. Meena Kaushik, in her recent dissertation on the religious life of the untouchable Doms responsible for cremation in Banaras, says that the Panchon Pir (in this case Gazi Miyan, Amina Sati, Bhairon, Buhana and Bande) are presently worshipped as Dom family deities, and that many Doms

attend the annual Mela of Gazi Miyan at Bahraich.[23] This writer encountered the belief in Gazi Miyan in Banaras in the context of professional healing, where the deity fulfills the role of specialized helping deity. One Bhagat (an oracle/exorcist who cures through his devotion to the Goddess) claims to regularly call Gazi Miyan from Mecca to help him deal with Muslim spirits.[24] Planalp also describes the practice of an Ojha who claims Gazi Miyan and Amina Sati as tutelary spirits whom he invites to possess his patients and himself in order to effect a cure.[25] Further research on the cult of the Panchon Pir in North India could reveal contemporary worship more extensive than now realized.

Bahadur Shahid and the Martyrs of the Faith

The second half of the list of "Muslim deities" found in the Mantras includes the names of several Shahids (śahīd, in Bhojpuri pronounced sahīd), "martyrs" who died at the hands of infidels in the defense of Islam. As we have seen in the case of Gazi Miyan, these religious martyrs easily acquire miraculous attributes and qualities as their legends circulate, and are absorbed into the general ambiance of the cult of saints' tombs. Like the saints, they are believed to be

´present´ at their burial sites. Some essence of their power is available to worshippers, and they are able to act as intermediaries between the faithful and other powerful beings. A description of the activity at one such graveyard (mazār) complex in Banaras will convey something of this ambiance.

From the perspective of exorcistic activity, the most active mazār within the city of Varanasi is that of Bahadur Shahid "Brave/Fearless Martyr"),[26] located in Sadar Bazaar near the Varanasi Railway Station. There are several small tombstones--both inside and outside the large courtyard of the graveyard--all of which receive worship, but the main tomb of Bahadur Shahid alone is enclosed by a small building, decorated with the names of Ali, Muhammad, and Allah in Urdu script over the main entrance. Men may climb the stairs of the dargāh building to worship the cloth-covered, horizontal gravestone without the mediation of an attendant. At one side of this enclosure is an opening where women, standing below, reach up to hand their offerings (flowers, money, incense, sweets) to a graveyard attendant (mujāwar)[27] who gives them ashes and water in return. The water, from a well inside the courtyard, is said to have special healing properties and is used to wash the tomb of the saint. The upper reaches of the

room are filled with pictures of Islamic holy sites, quotes from the Qur´an, and the written requests of petitioners who apply for the mercy and intercession of the martyr (also called "Baba") in their lives.

The history of the site is unclear, either forgotten or subject to the hagiographic imaginations of attendants and worshippers. A respected and learned maulānā (Islamic scholar) of the city is of the opinion that the large numbers of worshippers attending the dargāh for the "bhūt-pret" activity currently in evidence have been coming for only fifty to sixty years.[28] The young head Mujawar of Bahadur Shahid (the third generation in his family to serve in this capacity) reported that there are at least 25 graves at the site, but proper gravestones have been built only for those saints who have "revealed" themselves (jāhir ho jānā) in some way. Several stories are told about individuals who have seen the "Baba" or have experienced his power. One is that of Binnu, a blind Chamar.[29]

> Thirty to forty years ago, when there was no wall around the graveyard and the ground was yet uncleared, a blind Chamar named Binnu sat at the Baba´s place continuously for one year, singing and crying the Baba´s name. The Baba eventually became pleased with his prayers. One day, early in the morning, two roses dropped in front of the blind man´s eyes. A few minutes later he was able to see in all directions, and he shouted for joy. This Binnu is living still in a village outside

> Varanasi. He has become quite famous because of this incident, and returns to this place from time to time.

The circulation of this type of miracle story has no doubt contributed to the growth in attendance at the dargāh of Bahadur Shahid in the last few decades. The head Mujawar also offered this explanation of the identity of the saint (my paraphrase):

> Bahadur Shahid was one of four fakir (Sufi mendicants) sent to Varanasi by Kwajah Mu´innuddin Chisti of Ajmer in order to make converts to Islam [30]. The other three were named Shah Ayab Banarsi, Nuruddin Shahid, and Kharbuja Shahid, all of whom came with their own followers and settled in different areas of the city. There were disagreements with the "kāfir" [here, local Hindus] over their teachings, and all of the saints and their followers were eventually killed and buried at their present graveyard locations.

All four saints are considered by some Muslims to be the "gatekeepers" of Varanasi. Although I have not identified these names with existing mazār sites in the Varanasi area, this concept of the saints acting as guardians of the quarters is extremely interesting because it parallels the Hindu notion of the Bhairavas in their role as the guardians of different areas of the city.

Except for an occasional worshipper, the dargāh is almost empty except on Thursdays (jumerāt). On this day the courtyard is filled from the earliest hours of the

morning with single-minded petitioners praying with folded hands, curious observers, and groups involved in the exorcism of one or more of their members. Hindus appear to constitute at least 80% of the crowd, and women far outnumber the men present. The courtyard is alive with movement, the colors of *sāṛīs* and the dust raised by the rhythmic whipping of loosened hair. A pulsating cacophony of cries, wails, moans, heated argument, nasal singing and shrill laughter fills the air. Male family members frequently accompany their women to the *mazār*, but few take an active part in the attention given the possessed person in their group, preferring to wait in the background with other men. It is said that a person must come to this place on forty consecutive Thursdays in order to be completely cured or to have a special wish fulfilled. The women (and occasional men) who come to "play" are not possessed by Bahadur Sahid, but by the ghosts that have bothered them for some time. The presence of the resident saint acts to encourage these ghosts to take active possession of their vehicles, revealing their origin and demands. Only then may family members know how to deal with the cause of possession and ultimately convince the troublesome spirit into leaving. The "Baba" has the authority to hold a ghost to its promise to leave the

body of a patient, or to render it innocuous and keep it at the site of the mazār. This is the proper role of a "Jinn Nath," for Hindus the Islamic equivalent of the Bhut Nath. The pronouncements of the spirits are frequently delivered as a choking, sobbing, or nasal singing that is delivered in a strikingly similar style by women seated throughout the courtyard. It is clear that some of these women who come to the mazār weekly are in a transitional phase between spirit victim and professional oracle: they dominate the scene and are masters of the possession performance style. Ojhas and other professional healers are not permitted to ply their trade openly on the premises. The Muslim attendants are adamant about maintaining an atmosphere free from the machinations of professionals, and express open hostility about all forms of "tantric" practice. A Mujawar occasionally circulates through the crowd collecting contributions of money from the crowd; this and offerings make up the relatively small income of the dargāh.

Not everyone in the compound is engaged in possession activity. Many return on successive Thursdays in observance of a vow. Others make more costly offerings in gratitude for a "fulfilled desire" (manautī pūrī ho jānā). Muslim men and boys stop by to

pray before Bahadur Shahid's tomb, heads covered. Occasional groups of Muslim women wearing burkās (outer clothing that hides the body and face) come with their families to chat and observe the activities as though on a picnic.

Bahadur Shahid is just one of many mazārs in the region which draw both Hindu and Muslim pilgrims. Faizabad's Makhdum Shahid (Mantra 2, line 7) is also very popular among Banarsis, many of whom attend the saint's urs celebration in Chaitra (March-April). This Mela was large enough one hundred years ago to be mentioned in North Indian Notes and Queries[31]

> Makhdum Shah Ashraf Jahangir - This famous saint died at Kichancha in the Fyzabad District, Oudh, many hundred years ago. He is also believed by Muhammadans and even Hindus to have control over evil spirits, and thousands of people go every year to seek redress at the hands of Makhdum Sahib. It is believed that the evil spirits are summoned by the saint, and if they do not leave the affected person, they are burnt.

The Mantra's Chandan Shahid (2, line 6) may refer to the saint whose story was recorded by Cunningham over 100 years ago.[32]

> A Muhammadan saint living at Benares had his head cut off by a Hindu named Chandan, and he fled away without his head until he reached Sahsaran. Here he asked a woman for a pan, or betel, to eat, but she replied, "what is the use of giving you a pan when your head is gone?" on which the holy man at once dropped down dead. The shrine on the top of the hill

is called after him, Chandan Pir ...

If the increase in Hindu/Muslim tensions and the effect of fundamentalist movements has worked to diminish the household worship of "Muslim deities" among many Hindu castes, it appears to have had less of an effect on the position of Muslim saints and heroes in their function as village guardian deities or as miraculous centers of wish-fulfillment and healing. The more famous shrines of these "Muslim deities" are of a class with the regional shrines of Birs and Brahms, and are subject to the same vagaries of belief and tests of efficacy as are these other gods. Compare the stories and cultic activity of Brahm shrines presented in the next chapter.

NOTES

2.3 MUSLIM DEITIES

1 William Crooke, "Panchpiriya," _Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics_ (1917), IX, 600-601. See also Crooke, _Religion and Folklore of Northern India_ (London, 1926; rpt. Delhi: Chand & Co., 1972), pp. 165-166; R.C. Temple, _Legends of the Panjab_ (Patiala: Language Dept., 1962), I, 98-120.

2 Crooke, _Religion_, p. 166.

3 There is an English summary of this work in H.M. Elliot´s _The History of India_, ed. J. Dowson (1869), II, 513-549.

4 Richard Greeven, _The Heroes Five_ (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1898). Greeven summarizes his _Heroes Five_ material in numerous entries of _North Indian Notes and Queries_, (Allahabad), ed. William Crooke, II, No. 1 (April 1892), entries 10, 78, 85; No. 3 (June 1892), entries 149, 153; No. 4 (July 1892), entry 217; No. 5 (Aug. 1892), entries 299, 302, 306; No. 6 (Sept. 1892), entry 367; No. 7 (Oct. 1892), entry 413; No. 8 (Nov. 1892), entry 476; No. 9 (Dec. 1892), entry 537; No. 10 (Jan. 1893), entry 606; No. 11 (Feb. 1893), entry 672; III, No. 1 (April 1893), entry 25; "Marriage and Martyrdom of Ghazi Miyan," IV, No. 4, (July, 1894), entry 157; IV, No. 11 (Feb. 1895), entry 405.

5 Kerrin G.V. Schwerin, "Saint Worship in Indian Islam: The Legend of the Martyr Salar Masud Ghazi," in _Ritual and Religion Among Muslims in India_, ed. Imtiaz Ahmad (Delhi: Manohar, 1981), pp. 146-151.

6 Dowson, ed., _History_, II, 538, 541.

7 Dowson, ed., _History_, II, 541.

8 Crooke, "Panchpiriya," p. 601.

9 Dowson, ed. _History_, II, 547.

10 Crooke, "Panchpiriya," p. 601; Schwerin,

"Saint," pp. 155-156.

11 Schwerin, "Saint," p. 148.

12 Greeven, "Marriage."

13 Crooke, "Panchpiriya," p. 601; Schwerin, "Saint," p. 157; Crooke, Religion, pp. 99-102. The tales of the deified Ahirs Bir Kuar and Bechu Bir also follow this "bridegroom deity" pattern; see Part 3.3 below.

14 Crooke, "Panchpiriya," p. 601.

15 In addition to Amina Sati´s forest exile with her two sons, there are other incidents that occur in the Ghazi Miyan cycle that are reminiscent of the Ramayana story.

16 Jack M. Planalp, "Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village," Diss. Cornell University 1956, p. 768.

17 Schwerin, "Saint," p. 150; Pyare Lal, "Panchon Pir," North Indian Notes and Queries, III, No. 4 (July 1893), entry 116; Crooke, "Panchpiriya," p. 601.

18 Schwerin, "Saint," p. 152.

19 Little has been written about the Dafalis, the ´Muslim´ drummer-priests of Gazi Miyan. Crooke mentions that they are converted Mirasis, a low Hindu musician caste (note 14 in Schwerin, "Saint," p. 154), but the period of their conversion and assumption of the priestly role is unknown. They were/are, in any case, the main bearers of the oral traditions about the life of Gazi Miyan and his retinue in the form of folk songs, some of which have been recorded and translated by Greeven in his Heroes Five.

20 Planalp, "Religious Life," p. 770.

21 Planalp, "Religious Life," pp. 102 and 772.

22 Schwerin, "Saint," p. 158.

23 Meena Kaushik, "Religion and Social Structure: A Case Study of the Doms of Banaras," Diss. University of Delhi 1979, pp. 9-10.

24 Personal interview with Mithai Lal, November 21, 1981. The Muslim Healers observed by this writer were not ´possessed´ by their Babas and were, in fact, disdainful of this activity. One healer would conclude each session with a prayer to his Baba--a Pir located at a tomb in Faizabad--urging him to manifest his presence in the room and work to cure the assembled patients. Even more importantly, the Muslim healer uses his Baba to act as a messenger and intermediary between himself, his patients, and Ajmer Sharif, the most powerful Baba in all of India according to North Indian Muslims. Ajmer Sharif is one name for the entombed Sufi Pir Mu´inuddin Chisti in Ajmer, Rajasthan.

25 Planalp "Religious Life," p. 772.

26 The terms sayyid (a direct descendent of Muhammad through Alī and Fatima), śahīd (a religious martyr), and sometimes sāheb (a title of respect) are consistently conflated or confused.

27 Mujāwar from Arabic mujāwir, "an attendant at a mosque or shrine." John Thompson Platts, A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 1002.

28 Personal interview with Mufti Maulana Abdul Salam, March 18, 1982.

29 Personal interview with Mujawar Sakir, Nov. 10, 1980, at Bahadur Sahid mazār.

30 Mu´innuddin Chisti "reached Delhi in 1193, then settled in Ajmer, when the Delhi kings conquered this important city in the heart of Rajputana. His dwelling place soon became a nucleus for the Islamization of the central and southern parts of India. The Chisti order spread rapidly, and conversions in India during that period were due mainly to the untiring activity of the Chisti saints, whose simple and unsophisticated preaching and practice of love of God and one´s neighbor impressed many Hindus, particularly those from the lower castes, and even members of the scheduled castes." Annemarie Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam (Chapel Hill: Univ. of N. Carolina, 1975), p. 345.

31 Azizuddin Ahmed, North Indian Notes and Queries, I, No. 8 (Nov. 1891), entry 807.

[32] Alexander Cunningham, "Report of Tours in the Gangetic Provinces from Badaon to Bihar in 1875-6 and 1877-78," _Archaeological Survey of India_, (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1968), XI, 132-3.

2.4 Brahms

> Harasu Brahm, Dipau Brahm,
> Dhat Dhat Antaryami Brahm, Kaihasi Baram
>
> Harasu Brahm, Koleswar Brahm, Himal Brahm,
> Hari Brahm, Hathi Brahm, Hayeram Brahm,
> Maniya Brahm ...
>
> My brothers, our village Brahms, a hundred-thousand supplications!

The ancient mythological and legal concerns over the killing of a Brahman (brahmahatyā)[1] and the power of a Brahman's curse find their popular expression in the figure of the brahm (in Bhojpuri pronounced baram), the ghost of a Brahman who has died violently, prematurely, or under protest. The Brahm is one of several classes of deified dead which derive their power from the sacrificial, violent or untimely nature of their deaths. The Sati is not feared as much as she is honored: her chastity, devotion, and self-sacrifice have transformed her into a mostly benevolent deity. The Shahid or Bir, a local hero slain by enemies, is another example of exceptional self-sacrifice and martyrdom transmuted into posthumous presence and protection. In the case of the Brahm, it is that which is associated with, symbolized by, and inherent in the fact of brahmanhood--in conjunction with the violent or untimely nature of

death--which makes for the particular power and awesomeness of this spirit. Not only is it most serious to be involved in the death of a Brahman because of the "sin" (pāp) that will accrue, but a Brahman's sanctity can be transformed into a special power which may be directed against the guilty party. The Brahman seems to have the ability to utilize this technique to its fullest effect, and may wield it like a powerful curse. It is significant that many of the stories told about individual Brahm involve a suicide directed in protest at a wrongdoer, resulting in a virulent form of posthumous retribution. This particular form of protest is available to a Brahman who feels himself wronged yet is powerless to seek justice by other means, and is likely to occur in a confrontation with a wielder of temporal authority upon whom a Brahman is in some sense dependent. The theme of Brahman-Kshatriya (Thakur) interdependence/animosity occurs quite frequently in this regard, as the Thakur is often the dominant or landowning caste in this area of North India. Other stories demonstrate the vengeance of a murdered Brahman. Planalp recounts these three examples collected in Senapur and nearby villages.[2] One shrine

> can be traced back to an ancestor of one of the Dube families in Daudpur. He was employed as a government tax official, and in this

> capacity incurred the enmity of the Thakur landlords of several villages. One night he was ambushed and killed by some of these enemies. His relatives, suspecting that his spirit might become active, buried his ring in a special place. Soon his spirit spoke to them in their dreams, commanding them never to accept water from the Thakurs who had murdered him or their descendents. This injunction has been strictly observed, and it is said that the descendents of the murderers have suffered continually from supernatural retribution. Some have gone mad, while others have been born with deformities. [p. 776]
>
> Another famous Brahm, known as Raikal Brahm, is located between Kerakat and Jaunpur. This shrine commemorates a Brahman, who, as a result of a quarrel with a Thakur landlord, committed suicide by throwing himself in front of the Thakur's plow. The field where this occurred has remained uncultivated to the present day ... [p. 777]
>
> The grandfather of the old Pande purohit in Daudpur made a loan of money to one of his Thakur jajmans. The debtor died and his nephew refused to take responsibility for repaying the loan. In the traditional manner of protest, the Brahman allowed his hair and nails to grow long and refused to conduct ceremonies for, or even speak to, the members of the Thakur family. Before his death he gave instructions to his grandson for the burial of the nail clippings and cuttings of hair. He further asked that if his brahm, or spirit, should "awaken"--that is, if bad luck and misfortune should begin to harass the Thakur family, the spot where the nails and hair were buried should be marked by a mound or shrine and offerings should be made to the brahm. Since the death of the dissatisfied, protesting Brahman, the Thakur family has been plagued by a number of adversities which they attribute to the action of the brahm. [pp. 774-5]

By utilizing his power of protest a Brahman has recourse

to his <u>spiritual</u> <u>authority</u> in order to redress a wrong in the temporal sphere; he may posthumously harass or even cause the death of the offender and his descendents. Even without the element of protest and suicide, those who have a hand in the death of a Brahman have good reason to fear an unusual degree of retribution. This form of Brahmanical revenge lies behind the perceived power and danger of the Brahm, making necessary ritual acts of appeasement and propitiation. But not all Brahm shrines have arisen out of such dramatic incidents. The worship of many are contained, or at least begin, within the family unit.

The family worship of Brahm has the character of an ancestor cult with a difference: the ancestors worshipped are those who for some reason were not able to complete the journey to the "World of the Ancestors" (<u>pitṛ</u> <u>lok</u>) and beyond, and therefore continue to hover about the living. The shrines to Brahm (<u>brahm-asthān</u>) are generally built by families in order to honor or pacify one of their own. These unsettled spirits will make their presence known by appearing to or possessing a family member, or causing chronic illness or misfortune. Once identified, they are ritually established or "seated" (<u>biṭhānā</u>) in an outdoor shrine and are sustained by periodic offerings. In time a

shrine may acquire the reputation of a "Brahm Baba" for a wider population. As is true of many other local gods, the chief concerns addressed to the Brahm Baba involve the fulfillment of special desires and the alleviation of illness, infertility and other misfortunes. The Brahm Baba has special authority as well over problems caused by other troublesome Brahms and lesser spirits, the most powerful among them considered Bhut Naths or "Masters of Ghosts."

Two Brahm Baba temples are particularly famous in the Banaras region, and attract large numbers of pilgrims during certain seasons of the year. The first, Pishach Mochan, is located in the city of Varanasi itself. This temple is also referred to as "Kashi Brahm," and is promoted by its priests and area Ojhas as the city's most powerful Brahm Baba temple. The second, Harashu Brahm--located about 60 kilometers outside of the city in the adjoining state of Bihar--is known and patronized equally by people living in the Banaras area.

Kashi Brahm: Pishach Mochan Temple

Varanasi's Pishach Mochan Temple (Sanskrit piśāca mocana, "demon/ghost-liberation") is one of the primary locations in the sacred city of Banaras for the performance of ancestral śrāddha rites and other rituals

involving the pacification and removal of troublesome ghosts or spirits (bhūt-pret). An older and established city temple, it has accumulated--and to some extent integrated--multiple ´layers´ of explanatory myth and ritual activity. While it is difficult to determine with any certainty the historical sequence of these strands of ritual and myth, the result has been an institution which is able to accommodate the entire social and ritual spectrum from Brahman to Untouchable, educated to illiterate, orthodox to ´folk.´ The paṇḍās (pilgrimage priests) of the temple promote and provide a range of ritual services connected with the dead in whatever variations fulfill the knowledge, needs, and expectations of pilgrims. The temple complex contains a tank known for its pure and healing waters, and an image (liṅga) of Shiva named in the Kashi Khanda of the Skanda Purana. The main shrine also houses a large stone head of a sneering ´demon´ (piśāca) that is known as the city´s most powerful Brahm Baba, and is for many the temple´s principle deity. The śrāddha rites performed at the temple run the gamut from the highly orthodox to perfunctory, collective ceremonies supervised by illiterate temple servants. The exorcism of ghosts is also one of the temple´s major ritual services. A closer examination of Pishach Mochan´s mythology and

ritual offerings will give us a better understanding of the ways in which these various elements are orchestrated to provide for the different needs and perceptions of pilgrims.

From one point of view, the temple complex called Pishach Mochan is a Shiva temple set beside a large tank of water reputed to have special healing and purifying properties. Puranic mythology records the tank and *liṅga* as the original components of the site. According to the *Kashi Khanda*, one of Shiva's favorite *gaṇas*, named Kapardi, came to Kashi to establish a *liṅga* which became famous as Kapardisha.[3]

> Next to this image he dug a tank called Vimalodaka, the "pure waters" of which one need only touch to be cleansed of all defects and impurities. There was a Pashupata sage named Valmiki who would bathe in the tank and perform *tapas* in worship of the Kapardisha *liṅga*. Once while Valmiki was engaged in this worship, he was confronted by the sight of a horrible-looking *rākśasa* or *piśāca*. The sage asked the Pishach to explain his condition and his presence there. The Pishach, begging for mercy, responded with this tale. He had been a Brahman at a *tīrtha* on the Godavari River, and had taken alms from the pilgrims. As a result of this he was condemned to live as a *piśāca*, suffering from great hunger, thirst and extremes of temperature. After living many days in this condition, the Pishach saw a young Brahman who neglected to perform his morning prayers and proper ablutions after defecation. Due to these lapses in proper behavior, the Pishach was able to enter the Brahman's body and travel with him to Kashi. At the border of the sacred city he abruptly fell out of the Brahman's body along with the

> man's sins, unable to enter further for fear of the ganas of Shiva. He waited outside for the Brahman to return and searched in vain for food. But this was an impossible task, for even water would withdraw at his sight. Then one day he saw a sunyāsī, and overwhelmed by hunger the Pishach decided to eat him. Just as he was about to grab the sanyāsī the man uttered the powerful and purifying name of "Shiva" and the Pishach's sins were removed. As a result he was able to enter the outer limits of the city, but was still unable to go further. The Pishach said to Valmiki, "Then I saw you and I have come to beg your mercy. Please deliver me from the piśāca yoni." The sage, taking pity on him, told the Pishach to bathe in the pool called Vimalodaka and receive the darśan of Kapardishwar. But the Pishach protested that the deities inhabiting the water caused it to withdraw at his sight; he was not even able to drink, much less bathe. The Muni then gave him ashes which were consecrated with the name of Shiva. Rubbing these on his head the Pishach was able to bathe in and drink the water of Vimalodaka. He immediately acquired a divine body adorned with divine raiment, and mounted a celestial vehicle which bore him away on the path of the wind. As he departed, this divine being bowed to the Sage and said, "You have freed me from the piśāca yoni. Therefore, from today, the name of this tīrtha will be Pishachamochana [mocana = Hindi "deliverance, liberation, salvation"]. He who bathes at this tīrtha and receives the darśan of Kapardisha will be freed from the piśāca yoni. He who performs piṇḍadāna on behalf of his ancestors will free those who have accidentally fallen into piśāca yoni and attain for them the highest heaven (uttam gatī). Saying this, the fortunate divine being bowed to the sage and attained heaven (divya gati).

The name Pishach Mochan is therefore an epithet of Kapardishwar (Shiva): "One Who Causes Liberation From Pishachas," or "One Who Caused the Pishach's

Deliverance." Yet the importance of the Shiva _liṅga_ and the tank of pure waters has become somewhat obscured by other developments in temple activity. The Shiva image housed in the central shrine is now quietly excluded from most of the rituals taking place at the temple. Although acknowledged by the Pandas to be the main deity of the temple, the _liṅga_ is protected from the practitioners and clients of the exorcism rites and their "impure" offerings. The temple tank, on the other hand, has retained to some extent its reputation for the removal of bodily sins, defects and impurities. It has for several hundred years been the scene of a major bathing Mela held on Agahan Chaturdashi, the anniversary of the Pishach´s liberation. This Loṭa-Bhanta Mela is primarily attended by women, who come to bathe in the tank and make special offerings in the hope of receiving offspring. This focus on fertility is not as inconsistent with the original reputation of the tank´s waters as it might seem, for infertility is often viewed as a karmic or other supernaturally imposed blockage of fertility which might be removed by such a purifying bath. But in recent years only a few hundred women have come to bathe in Vimal Kund--now a stagnant green pond--and this aspect of temple activity is definitely on the decline.[4]

The liberation of the Pishach is not only the paradigmatic event upon which the bathing Mela is based, but also the mandate for the performance of ancestor rites at the temple. The _Kashi Khanda_ story tells us that bathing in the tank and receiving the _darśan_ of Kapardishwar will not only free the pilgrim from his sins and ensure his avoidance of lingering _piśāca_-hood, but the performance _piṇḍadāna_ for the ancestors will similarly enact _their_ liberation. Yet the story fails to explain the existence of the large "demon head" (_piśāca mastak_) in what now appears to be the main shrine of the temple. We must shift to an oral version of the myth told to Diana Eck for an explanation of this second image.[5]

> ... Bhairava decapitated a _piśāca_ who attempted a forced entry into Kāśī. The head was brought before Viśvanātha, and, still able to speak, it pleaded for mercy. It asked to be allowed to remain in Kāśī on the site of its severing and it asked that all pilgrims to Gayā, going to perform funereal _śrāddha_ rites there, be required to stop at Piśācamocana in Kāśī first. Śiva granted its request. The _piśāca_ agreed, in turn, to provide the service of releasing people from the evil spirits, the _piśācas_, that plague them.

This oral version of the Pishach story shifts the focus from the temple tank and Shiva image to the Pishach as the primary deity of the temple. Here, the Pishach's "deliverance" is more than the prototypical event which

made possible the liberation of souls to follow, but an event which transformed the Pishach himself into a deity with the power to free pilgrims from the unsettled spirits that torment them. Furthermore, the oral traditions now current at the temple emphasize the identity of the Pishach as a brāhmaṇa.[6] Bhairava's mythological reputation for brahmahatyā (the murder of a Brahman) also reinforces this identification.[7] For the great majority of the temple's pilgrims, the presiding deity at Pishach Mochan temple is this very "Brahm Pishach," "Brahm Rakshas," or "Brahm Baba" (also called "Kashi Brahm" or "Pishach Brahm"). In fact, Pishach Mochan is known as one of the region's most powerful Brahm Baba temples--along with Chainpur's (Bihar) Harashu Brahm--and is the pilgrimage destination of last resort for many in outlying districts who have problems with particularly tenacious ghosts. The ritual solutions to these problems are as follows.

As we have said, Pishach Mochan is one of the major locations in the city (in addition to Manikarnika, Dashashvamedha and Raj Ghats) where śrāddha rites are performed, and these occur most numerously during the period of pitṛ pakṣ (Ashvin Kr. 1-15), the "Fortnight of the Ancestors." The two main types of śrāddha rituals seen at the temple are the seasonal "Gaya or Tirth

Sraddh"--offered by pilgrims en route to Gaya for the completion of their ancestral ritual obligations--and the "Tripindi Sraddh" (also called "Pret Sraddh") which is offered throughout the year in order to "ease the suffering, fever, aches and pains caused by _bhūt_, _pret_, _piśāc_, etc."[8] When the latter ritual is enacted by a Brahman ritual specialist (_karma kāṇḍī_) or a family's _purohit_ with its proper Sanskrit _paddhati_ (ritual procedure or manual), it is said to to grant the _pret_ in question "liberation" (_mukti_) or a place in some divine realm. The orthodox version of this ritual is enacted with the recitation of Vedic and Puranic "_mantras_," and includes the following acts: water libations (_tarpaṇa_) to all the gods, beings and ancestors; worship of the _śālagrāma_; the establishment and worship of three pots, flags and images representing Visnu, Brahma, and Rudra; the offering of three _piṇḍa_ balls--one of barley flour, one of rice flour, and one of black sesame seeds--on the "seats" of these three deities respectively; worship of the three _piṇḍas_; the ritual payment of participating Brahmans, and the _darśan_ of the presiding deity/ies of the temple. It is not totally clear why this particular form of _śrāddha_ came to be used for the purpose now stated in the ritual manual--relief from spirit-caused illness and

affliction--or the ritual mechanism by which this is effected. It is possible that a family's "bhūt, pret, piśāca, etc." are "liberated" by the intercession of the three deities so elaborately worshipped, or, more likely, the ghosts--addressed as "ancestors" (pitaraḥ) in the rite--are ritually homologized with these deities, symbolizing and enacting their union with them in their respective heavens. In any case, the Tripindi Sraddh is available to pilgrims at whatever degree of elaboration befits their aims, financial means and ritual knowledge. It may be performed for a client by a karma kāṇḍī in a complete and orthodox manner, or conducted by a temple Panda or servant as a brief exercise. At the latter end of this continuum of ritual performance, the Tripindi Sraddh has been adapted to the ways and means of ojhāī (the work of the exorcist/Ojha), and has been simplified into a fairly brief ritual in which the Ojha plays a role not unlike that of the family priest. Temple Pandas often refer to this exorcistic version of the ritual as the "Bhut" or "Bhutwala Tripindi" ("wala" being a Hindi suffix here meaning "the one relating to" ghosts) to distinguish it from its more orthodox forms. A typical Bhut Tripindi, which is really a ritual of exorcism, might be conducted as follows:

The individual performing the ritual--troubled for some time by one or more ghosts--bathes in the temple tank and dons fresh, clean clothing. The following items are provided by a temple servant for a small fee: a clay cup filled with tank water, a shallow clay dish filled with a mixture of rice and barley flour and black sesame seeds, a handful of small flowers, three strands of darbha grass and a grass ring (pavitra). The pilgrim places the grass ring on the 'ring finger' of his right hand. A temple Panda then directs him in the shaping of three small piṇḍa balls from the flour mixture and water provided, while he intones a mixed Sanskrit and Hindi chant naming the time, place and performer of the ritual. ("In the 12th Kalpa, in Jambu Dvipa, in Aryavarta, in Kashi, at Pishacha Mochana, at Vimala Tirtha ...") The performer is then instructed to offer the balls, one at a time, on top of a strand of darbha grass, each time accompanied by the Panda chanting the names of various types of ghosts and requesting them--having become "deities"--to stay in Kashi. ("Hey Mari, Hey Maruwa, Hey Marayal, Hey Brahm, Hey Bhavani ... from birth to birth, for seven ages, for seven births, becoming devatā, stay in Kashi and work for our welfare.") The last ball is followed by the same chant, but offered to the unknown and forgotten dead and victims of violent death. ("To the forgotten, known and unknown, fallen from trees, drowned in water, burned in fire, having become bhūt, having become pret, those met on the road ... Hey Mari, Hey Maruwa," etc.) Flowers are then offered on top of the piṇḍa balls and the Panda instructs the performer to pray to the Brahm Baba to help him in this endeavor.

The Panda then departs, and the client's Ojha takes his place. (This Ojha has probably been treating the patient for some time, and it was he who suggested this trip to the temple. The "seating"--biṭhānā--of ghosts at Pishacha Mochana also entails special rituals in the patient's village, both before and after the visit to the temple.) The Ojha draws a circle on the ground with the flower petals, and

places one or more cloves (depending upon the number of ghosts to be exorcised) inside this circle. The Ojha, who has brought the ghost to the temple in his own body transfers, the ghost with some difficulty to the clove inside the circle. There is a brief, controlled period of "playing" (khelnā) as the ghost shows itself and offers final resistance. This is manifested by the head-jerks, clicks, whistling, high-pitched nasal protest and other similar gestures and vocalizations of the Ojha. After the ghost is settled in the clove, the Ojha makes a series of offerings which may include the lighting of incense, burning of camphor, the cutting of a piece of nutmeg or several small, green lemons (substances containing a high degree of "life"--jīv--in them, and offered in lieu of animal sacrifice). He may also pack and burn a clay chillum filled with cannabis (ganjā) and offer a quantity of country liquor by pouring it on the ground.

When the Ojha has finished his offerings, the temple Panda returns, and all three argue about the final price of the ritual. The Ojha openly takes the part of the client, but has previously informed the Panda how much may be extracted from this individual, a sum he will ultimately share with the Panda. When the price has been agreed upon, the Panda places his fingers on the ghost-inhabited clove, and finishes the ritual by listing (in chant) the services and fees of the ritual and requesting the ghost to remain at the temple under the authority of the Brahm Baba. The performer is instructed to form the three piṇḍa balls into one, and the clove is sealed inside. The Panda then slaps the client on the back three times (piṭh ṭhokna), the final blessing which completes the ritual. The piṇḍa ball and other ritual substances are then thrown into the temple tank or a covered well (brahm kūp) by the client.

Often the Ojha and his client will demand a "receipt" (the English word is used) from the Panda, a printed form listing the names of the temple and priests to which are added the

> names of the Ojha, client and any witnesses. This receipt is proof for involved parties back in the village that the "seating" of a ghost has actually taken place, and offering a return visit free of charge if a client is not satisfied.

Significant here is the reduction of the orthodox rite to its most fundamental outline--the offering and worship of the three piṇḍas. Attention to the Vedic gods has been replaced by the dominating figure of the Brahm Baba, and the Ojha and his repertoire of ´magical´ ritual techniques acts in the role of the Karma Kandi or Purohit. Interesting also is the difference in the perceived results of the ritual. Many who conduct the orthodox Tripindi Sraddh maintain that the pret in question is released from its condition and attains a new state of being, e.g., it attains "liberation" (mokṣa) or becomes an "ancestor" (pitṛ). The clients of the Ojha believe that the ghosts brought by them to the temple are "seated" (biṭhānā--ritually established or held) at the site. The temple offers other services that reinforce this latter objective. For instance, a ghost may be nailed with an iron spike to a Pipal tree in one section of the temple. At another, a client may establish a small, cone-shaped ´image´ beneath a large sacred tree in order in order to provide a ghost a permanent place to reside.

Pishach Mochan temple Pandas insist that the many forms of the Tripindi Sraddh performed at the temple are in fact the same ritual producing the same results. When asked why a soul attaining moksa must be "seated" at the temple or nailed to a tree, the Pandas blame the Ojhas for this "deception," and protest their helplessness to do other than accommodate themselves to the ways of ojhāī. While neither Panda nor Ojha can be said to be totally innocent of a degree of opportunism in the promotion of their services, there is less deception here than allowance for the multiple explanations of the fate of the unquiet dead professed by pilgrims at the temple. Both the foundation myth and the performance of the Tripindi Sraddh have evolved in forms sufficiently flexible to accommodate all of these various views.

Harashu Brahm

Despite the reputation of Pishach Mochan's Brahm Baba, many of the residents of Varanasi and surrounding villages prefer to "seat" Brahm and other ghosts at Harashu Brahm Temple in Chainpur, Rohatas District, Bihar. Harashu Brahm lies approximately 60 kilometers from Varanasi, the journey a 3-4 hour bus ride with many stops and changes en route. The most famous Brahm Baba

in the region, Harashu Brahm draws pilgrims from an area that includes much of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In 1882 Alexander Cunningham had this to say about the popularity of the site:[9]

> The fame of Harshu has now extended over a large portion of Northern India, and people from all parts flock to his shrine. All who have been long ill, all who fancy themselves bewitched, all who have disputes about land, come to consult the ghost of Harshu ... The number of pilgrims or visitors has rapidly increased during the past few years ... [coming from] all parts of Northern India, including Delhi and Benares.

There is little evidence that attendance has decreased since the time of Cunningham. Harashu Brahm is promoted as a <u>dhām</u> by temple servants, a term used for the major (and aspiring) pilgrimage centers of India. The desire to engage in pilgrimage is a large part of the motivation for the journey to Harashu Brahm for the residents of Varanasi. Pilgrimage is an infrequent event that is cheerfully anticipated and enjoyed, especially by women who have few occasions to leave the home for extended periods of time. The additional effort and sacrifice is also felt to enhance one´s chance of success at obtaining what one desires through pilgrimage.[10] Many of Varanasi´s residents also express their preference for the longer trip to Harashu Brahm in order to decrease the risk of a troublesome ghost re-

possessing its victim, something more likely to occur if it is deposited at a nearby shrine. It is also common for people to seek a cure at a distant shrine, after failing to receive satisfaction from deities closer at hand. Preferences, too, may be governed by the habits and traditions of a village or family, especially with regard to long-established relationships with the priests of a given temple.

The Harashu Brahm temple is located among the ruins of an old fort, the remaining features of which--a gate and crumbling walls, a well, a graveyard and yagya śālā (an enclosure in which fire sacrifices are performed)--have been incorporated into some version of the legend told about the place. The guardian deities of the complex include the "Fort's Mistress" (kile kī mālikin), a Mari--in this case a sweeper woman who was sacrificed at the temple gate in order to bind her spirit to the protection of the fort--who is worshipped at a small shrine before entering the gate, and the two low-caste (Dom) bodyguards of the Brahm Baba--Husai-Musai Domara--who are the recipients of the impure substances offered by the Ojhas outside the temple compound. Harashu Brahm is also said to retain 108 Brahms which live in the vicinity of the shrine and act as his servants. Inside the walls we find an enclosed area containing the tomb

of one Garha Shah Sayyid,[11] where pilgrims bothered by jinn are brought by temple Pandas. The main shrine of the Brahm Baba is itself surprisingly crude. In a small, rectangular room--two sides of which are open except for an iron grille--a low, rough stone is set into the tile floor. This small patch of stone is the mūrti of Harashu Brahm, barely visible beneath layers of sindūr and flowers. A small Ganesh image rests in a niche above this stone, and two other unremarkable-looking bas-relief images--one identified as Kamaru Kamakhya, the Brahm's iṣṭadevatā--are set on a ledge to the left of the Brahm stone.

Below are two versions of the Harashu Brahm story. The first was recorded by Cunningham in 1881-2,[12] and the second told to this writer by a temple Panda in 1980, almost one-hundred years later.[13]

> (1) Harshu Deva or Harshu Baba, was a Kanaujiya Brahman, and the purohit of Raja Salivahan of Chayanpur, near Sahsaram. He held thirty-three villages in Jagir, and lived at Jamua, 5 miles to the north of Chayanpur. Raja Salivahan of Chayanpur having married a second wife (a Bhagelni of the Rewa family), his first wife suspected that her husband had been influenced by his purohit, and determined to ruin him. It so happened that Harshu at this time began to exhibit a light raised on a pole on the top of his house at Jamua, which could be seen at Chayanpur. The elder Rani insinuated to the Raja that this exhibition was part of an ambitious project to oust him from his kingdom, and the credulous man was so worked upon by his wife that he at last

resumed possession of the thirty-three villages held by his purohit. Hearing this the enraged Brahman at once sat down in dharna before the Raja´s palace, determined to starve himself for a month, unless his jagir was restored. His dharna is said to have begun on the 4th Magh Badi, in Samvat 1484, or A.D. 1472, and his death to have followed 21 days afterwards on the 15th Magh Sudi. As the period which he had prescribed to himself had not been completed, his guru proceeded to Chayanpur and called up the ghost or spirit of Harshu to finish the 31 days required. Ever since then his ghost has been worshipped by the people of Chayanpur, and Hom is offered daily by the ministering Brahman for the benefit of all classes.

The story of Harshu is continued after his death, as the people assert that his ghost, burning for revenge, proceeded to Delhi, and prevailed on the king to send a Muhammadan army to expel the Raja from Chayanpur. The Raja resisted and was killed, and the whole of his family were exterminated with the single exception of one female ... the second wife of the Raja. After Harshu´s death this queen went back to her father´s house at Rewa, where she gave birth to two sons. In the meantime one of the aboriginal Cheru chiefs took possession of Chayanpur. After some years the Rani´s eldest son came to Chayanpur, where he was employed by the Cheru chief as a horse soldier. But the story of his birth being discovered, the Cheru Raja placed the young prince on the throne, and gave up his own rights, simply reserving to his family the privilege of placing the tika mark on the forehead of each new Raja. This privilege the descendant of the Cheru chief still claims. The Raja´s family is Rajput of the Sikrwar clan, and the present head Surajbhan Sah claims to be eleventh in descent from the unfortunate Raja Salivahan.

(2) The Raja of the fort--named Soleman--was in love with a beautiful Brahman village girl who was already promised to a village Brahman. The Rani found out about this, and refused to

agree to the marriage. The Brahman also tried to dissuade the Raja, but he persisted. The Rani then went to her "anger room" (kop griha), and when the Raja went to her to find out what was wrong, she said that she would come out only if he agreed not to marry the girl. But the Raja refused to agree. The Brahman then came and committed suicide in front of the castle. Before he died, the girl came to him and temporarily revived him by pouring water into his mouth. He told her that his body would become a stone so that no one would be able to remove him. He said that the Raja´s entire line would be destroyed. The children of the girl´s family were to come to him and worship him for health and prosperity, and they would become his priests. Then he died. When the Raja tried to cremate the Brahman, the body turned to stone. When he tried to have the stone dug up, he discovered that it went deep into the ground and could not be removed. The Brahman then came to the Raja as a Brahm and told him that the girl´s family were to be his pujārīs, and they would hold the legal rights to his shrine.

Thereafter the Brahm came daily to worship his iṣṭadevatā (Kamaru Kamakhya Devi) and to frighten the Raja. The Raja performed many rituals in an attempt to appease the Brahm. The Brahm began to go daily to Kashi to worship. The Brahm then went to Delhi to meet a Muslim Raja--Alauddin Khilji--and offered to help him attack Raja Soleman. Khilji established his armies on the hill opposite the Raja´s fort, and started the battle. He captured and destroyed the entire fort except for the yagya śālā and the Brahm stone. The Rani´s bodyguard, Garha Shah Sayyid, a great wrestler, was also killed in the battle. He became a Jinn, and continues to dwell in the graveyard where he was buried. The Brahm told the victor that he would remain at the site, and the girl´s family would build a temple around his stone and would act as his pujārīs. The shrine´s present priests are the descendants of this Brahman village girl.

The broad outline of the Harashu Brahm story has

remained essentially the same in these two versions separated by 100 years. The Brahman Harashu commits suicide in response to an injustice perpetrated by the Raja, and his Brahm later sees to the Raja's downfall by urging the attack of a Muslim army from Delhi. There is a jealous Queen in both versions, and a "second Rani/village girl" who is the cause of jealousy and conflict. But here the similarities end. In the second story told by a contemporary Panda, Harashu was not the Raja's family priest but a village Brahman. Instead of the Raja's second wife (a Rajput), it is the village Brahman girl who survives, and it is her descendents who become the priests of the powerful Brahm. This modern version of the story legitimizes the role of one group of temple Pandas as the rightful priests of the temple,[14] and contextualizes the features of the contemporary site. The story explains the appearance of the rough stone 'image,' the presence of Kamaru Kamakhya Devi at the main shrine, the existence of the old _yagya śālā_ and the tomb of Garha Shah Sayyid used in the exorcism of _jinn_. Missing from the narrative are the shreds of historical information more relevant to a former era.[15]

The activity at Harashu Brahm is roughly threefold. The site is, of course, renown for the "seating" of

Brahm. As Brahmans are very likely to be afflicted with Brahm problems--often the ghosts of their own family members--they regularly use the services of the Brahm Baba and the Brahman Pandas. There are 38 families of Brahmans that serve the temple, dividing labor and income according to a pārī (literally "by turn") system. Pandas may keep clients in their own homes, especially if they are in need of a long-term cure.

In addition to the this specialty, Harashu Brahm has a reputation as a center for exorcism in general, and is one of the several regional temples utilized by Ojhas and their patients. Because the iṣṭadevatā, Mantras, and general coercive power of a low caste healer may not be equal to the strength and stubbornness of a high caste spirit, it is often necessary for an Ojha to accompany patients troubled by difficult and dangerous Brahms to a Brahm Baba Temple. The exorcism and possession activity peaks during the two annual Nav Ratras when the temple compound is filled with healers, the possessed and their escorts, and other pilgrims. The ghost-afflicted are, again, mostly women. As witness to the number who come to "play" before the Brahm Baba, the ground in front of the shrine is littered with colorful bits of broken glass bangles. The temple also boasts an agni kuṇḍ--a small, round fire

pit--where flames are said to burn the ghosts out of the body, leaving the patient unharmed. Placing one's hand in this flame is also a test of "true" possession.

Drawn also by the power and reputation of the Brahm Baba are the many who visit the shrine in hope of being granted an urgent desire (manautī, manokāmanā). Often the petitioners are women, who bear a great psychological and ritual responsibility for the welfare of their families. Anxiety over fertility is a common motivation for attendance. A child's first cutting of hair (garb kā bāl or "womb hair") is ceremonially offered to the Brahm Baba when this deity fulfills the desire for offspring.

In light of what has been said about the figure of the Brahm, we will next turn to a description of three Bir Babas in the Varanasi region so that we might compare and contrast the cults of these deities.

NOTES

2.4 BRAHMS

1 "No greater crime is known on earth than slaying a Brahmana ..." G. Buhler, ed. and trans., The Laws of Manu (Oxford, 1886), p. 320.

2 Jack M. Planalp, "Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village," Diss. Cornell University 1956.

3 Summarized from the Hindi translation of Vaikunthanath Upadhyaya, Śrī Kāśī Khaṇḍ (Varanasi, samvat 2031), Part 54 ("vimalodaka-tīrtha par piśāca-mocana"), pp. 24-31. Another summary of this story from the Sanskrit is given in Diana L. Eck, "Banaras: City of Light: The Sacred Places and Praises of Kasi," Diss. Harvard University 1976, pp. 506-507.

4 Temple Pandas blame the Kali Age and the increasing pollution of the tank's water for the decline of the Lota-Bhanta Mela. From another perspective, one might identify the growing numbers attending the annual bathing Mela at Lolarak Kund--a very similar happening in both its enactment and purpose--for the loss of popularity of the Pishach Mochan Mela.

5 Eck, "Banaras," p. 507, note 53.

6 This version was told to the writer by a temple Panda on November 15, 1980:

> The name of this place used to be Vimala Kund. Now it is called Pishach Mochan, but then its name was Vimaḷ Kund. The Rakshas was from Calcutta. The Bhatt Rakshas [Bhatt Brahmans now serve as the Pandas of the main temple. This story makes them descendents of the rākśasa or piśāca of the early legend] had leprosy over his entire body. So he came to Kashi. Valmiki lived at Valmiki Tilla and worshipped Hanumanji there. The Rakshas went up to Valmiki and said, "Maharaj, I have come to you." But Valmiki said, "You need something from me? Don't bother me. Let me do my worshipping. Get out of here!" But the Rakshas did not obey; he

kept insisting. So angrily Valmiki said, "All right, go. Go bathe in Vimal Kund, and your leprosy will be removed." The Rishi promised him, "Your welfare is assured."

Vimal Tirtha was a small spring at that time. It was a small tank and the water was like cows´ milk. People would purify themselves in it. They would offer it. They would take it for drinking. No one bathed in it.

So hearing Valmiki´s words the Brahm Rakshas who had leprosy jumped into the water. At that time there wasn´t much water, so when he jumped in the water became muddy. He bathed in this. He bathed five times. After bathing he went back to the Rishi and told him, "I am cured." (His leprosy was so bad that his fingers were cut off and his entire body was covered with sores. He was not fit to look at. But he had become completely cured, completely clean.) He said to Valmiki, "Maharaj, by your refuge and blessing I am cured. The defects and disease are gone. It is my desire to offer one lākh [100,000] rupees." Valmikiji said, "You want to offer dān [a donation for a religious purpose]. I repeat my prayers in the morning, I sing the bhajans of God. I am the servant of Hanuman. I have no need for money. But if it is your wish, if you insist, then go. Go to Vimal Kund, and with the lākh of rupees in your hand, formally state this contract (sankalp karnā): 'May my offspring live happily and my heart´s desires be fulfilled if I have this tank constructed. I am giving one lākh rupees for the construction of this tank.' Go Pishach, you have been saved. Return to your town and explain to the people that this is Pishach Mochan tank, where all pret and piśāc receive liberation (kī gati ho jātī hai), and where all evil influences, defects, and ghosts (grah, piśāc, rākśas, bhūt, pret, kleś) will be removed from your body."

7 For the mythological portrayal of Bhairava´s brahmanicide, see Part 1.5, notes 9 and 10. See also David N. Lorenzen, The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

8
Pandit Vayu Nandan Mishra, Śuklayajurvedīya Tripiṇḍī Śrāddh Paddhati (Varanasi: Master Khelarilal and Sons, n.d.), p. 1.

9
Alexander Cunningham, "Report of a Tour in the Central Provinces and Lower Gangetic Doab in 1881-82," Archaeological Survey of India, XVII, 160.

10
Turner writes about this tendency for people "to go as pilgrims to distant shrines rather than near ones" even when they are living in or near a major pilgrimage center, and the "communitas" experienced by such an event. Victor Turner, Dramas, Fields and Metaphors (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 166ff. Devout Banarsis regularly travel to locations outside the city on pilgrimage, Harashu Brahm being one of these destinations. Consistent with this same principle, it appears that most of the pilgrims attending Varanasi's Pishach Mochan temple come from outside the city, from locations several hours away to great distances.

11
The titles Sayyid--an honorific title for one who is said to have descended from the Prophet--and Shahid ("martyr") are often conflated. The name Garha is most likely derived from the word gaṛh for "fortress or castle."

12
Cunningham, "Report," pp. 160-161. Another version of the Harshu Brahm story is as follows:

> In Chayanpur Babua, in the Arrah District, there is a platform in honor of Harshu Brahm. There was once a king Sahbaran there. He built a great palace. Harshu Paure was his family priest. He had four sons. They built a house higher than the Raja's palace. One day the Raja and Rani were asleep on the roof of the palace, and they saw a light high up on Harshu's house. The Raja told the Rani that this was the house of their family priest. The next day the Rani got her courtiers to hint to the Raja that his family priest by building his house as high as that of the Raja showed his intention of contending with his master. So the Raja was angry and sent workmen, who knocked down Harshu's house. He was so grieved that he sat dharna at the palace door for 22 days without food or drink. No one could induce him to go away. Finally the king's daughter implored him to drink, and Harshu drank a little water from her hand.

Sugar had been mixed in the water. When he drank this, Harshu said, "You said you would give me only water. Why did you give me sherbet?" She said she gave it to him only to relieve his thirst. He blessed her, and told that her progeny would increase and the Raja be destroyed. Then Harshu died. When they went to take his corpse to Benares they saw him standing there with his wooden sandals on. He said he had become a Brahm, and whoever worshipped him would get his desires fulfilled. Now his altar is worshipped with fire sacrifice, Brahmanical cords and sweets. If anyone obtains his wish he offers a golden Brahmanical cord and a silken waist string, and feeds Brahmans in his name. Contributed by Khairat Ali North Indian Notes and Queries, II, No. 3 (June 1892), entry 152.

13

Personal interview with Harashu Brahm Panda G.S. Tripathi on November 24, 1980.

14

It is rare to find a profitable temple whose organization is free of competing or conflicting claims to "right-holdership." To belong to the lineage of priests actually chosen by Harashu Brahm is more than an idle boast. In 1980 there were two groups of Brahmans attending the shrine, one reported to be outsiders from Banaras who acquired pārī rights at some later point in time. In 1812(3), Francis Buchanan noted a similar conflict between those claiming to be descendents of the Raja versus those claiming to be descendents of the Brahm:

> The Pujaris who are making a good thing of the ghost have lately been disturbed by a stout, savage young Brahman who pretends to be descended from the person whose ghost is the source of profit in which he wishes to share. He is nearly naked, painted red, white and yellow like an American Indian, and the most violent fellow, in talk at least, that I have ever seen. The Pujari pretends that all the persons pretending to be descended of the old Rajahs are mere pretenders, as the ghost killed the whole males at least. There is however reason to suspect that even the present owner is a descendent, and although he calls himself a Patan, as being here the strong party, that his ancestor saved his estate by becoming a convert and was by birth a Rajput, not that he was the head of the

family but was a Rajkumar who obtained a grant of the village on becoming a Moslem. C.E.A.W. Oldham, ed., Journal of Francis Buchanan Kept During the Survey of the District of Shahabad in 1812-1813 (Patna, 1926), p. 129.

15
The account of the Cheru chiefs is interesting in this regard. There is historical evidence that a group called the Cherus occupied the territory before the incursions of both Rajputs and Muslims. Another remark by Buchanan [Journal, p. 121] bears an interesting resemblance to the Cunningham account of the sons of the Raja´s second wife in the court of the Cherus:

> The Raj Kuwar Rajputs to whom the country lately belonged allege that at their arrival the Cherus held the country. Two Raj Kuwars entered into the service of the Cheru chief, and soon after betrayed him to the Muhammedan king of Dilli and obtained his lands.

2.5 Bir Babas

> Babu Kedariya Bir, Uday Bir, Mangalaha Bir,
> Koyala Bir, Daitra Bir, Siha Bir, Karman Bir,
> Banas Bir, Jogi Bir, Joga Bir, Chhatariya Bir,
> Savati-Vindhyavati Bir, Khabaran Bir, Dyorhiya Bir,
> Dana Bir, Putua Bir, Ajori Bir,
>
> Lanka Dait, Sivalaya Dait, Joharbair Dait,
> Icchana Dait, Palm Tree Dait, Pipal Tree Dait,
> Babul Tree Dait, Dhandhera Dait,
>
> Pisach Bir, Lauhara Bir, Panniya Bir,
> Chhatariya Bir, Bhagod Bir, Gauhra Bir,
>
> Babu Diha Hira Bir ...

We next come to the second Mantra´s extensive list of Bir Babas. Some of the Birs named therein are known to the writer, and are located within or near Banaras city limits. Others are likely to be found in the many villages of the region. Lahura Bir is one of the better-known Birs in the city, the namesake of a major intersection and neighborhood (Bhoju Bir--unlisted--is also an informal name of an adjacent city muhallā). Daitra Bir, in nearby Chait Ganj, is said to be Lahura´s Bir´s brother. Mangalaha Bir is the Dih of the village of Kapildhara. Siha Bir of Ramnagar is especially popular among area Ojhas. This Bir is not only the Dih Baba of the fortress city across the Ganga, but has a wider circle of authority over the villages on the south

side of Varanasi. Karman Bir's temple is located in a field now within the campus of Banaras Hindu University. Despite the dislocation of the village necessitated by the construction of the University, this Bir remains the Dih of Sir Karhiya, now located outside the University wall. There is a Jogi Bir in Narayanpur--a 'suburb' of Banaras--said to be the samādhi of a blind ascetic.

The names of the Birs occasionally make interesting commentary. Dyorhiya Bir is named after a "threshold" (ḍyoṛhī), the natural location of a "doorkeeper" dwārpāla or guardian deity.[1] The designation Pisach Bir and the list of Dait included among the Birs is witness to the origin of many Birs as hungry ghost or restless spirit (daitya, piśāca). Diha Hira Bir is given special honor as the guardian deity of the chanter's village. Chhatariya Bir identifies the Bir as warrior or Kshatriya.

In the following pages I would like to examine certain aspects of the cults and oral traditions of three Bir Babas mentioned with particular frequency by Banaras area informants. The first, Kedariya Bir, is perhaps the oldest site. Comparison of a recent version of the Bir's story with a century-old report demonstrates the continuity of such a shrine and the possibilities for the revival and reinterpretation. The

next two, Bachau and Bechu Birs, do not find a place in our healers´ Mantras, yet are included here because of their current significance or popularity. The story of Bachau Bir is a contemporary example of a timeless process: the deification of a slain hero. The shrine of Bechu Bir is currently the scene of the region´s largest Bir Baba Mela.

Kedariya Bir

The only Bir Baba listed in the first Mantra, and distinguished as the healer´s "own true Guru" in the second, is Kedariya Bir, located on the bank of the Gomati River outside of the city of Jaunpur approximately 60 kilometers from Varanasi. There is speculation in the early journals of the Bir´s pre-Islamic origin and association with the aboriginal Bhars. A 1892 article in the Calcutta Review relates this story:[2]

> When the great Ramchandra reigned in Ajudhya, there dwelt in the nook of the Gomati, where Jaunpur now stands, the giant demon Kerar. And whereas the highways were unsafe by reason of his violence, Ramchandra in person marched against him, and having vanquished him in single conflict, left the giant´s trunk lying as a memorial and a warning, but flung his limbs and head to the corners of heaven. Yet over the trunk the demon´s followers built a temple, there paying divine honours to their lost lord.

The story may represent the contest between

> the Aryan invader and the Bhars. Firoz found a temple dedicated to Kerarbir within the lands of the village of Kerara. The Hindus named the new fort Kerarkot, and the ground adjoining to the north is still known as muhalla Kerara. An equally probable interpretation of the myth is that Kerar names not a single hero, but a clan of Bhars. Elliot names Kerar as a still existing Bhar State. Kerakat, the eastern parganna of Jaunpur, may be derived in the same way.
>
> Still under the southern wall of the fort is the shrine of Kerarbir, partly covered by the stones of the fallen wall... The object worshipped is a large stone, bearing a rude resemblance to the upper part of the human trunk, smeared thickly with tumeric and the like, so that it is impossible to see what kind of stone it may be.

The Pujari of the contemporary temple (now called Kerariya or Kedariya Bir) tells a similar tale, but identifies the Bir as an Ahir or Yadav.[3]

> When Shri Ramji came here, having killed Ravan, he let a horse free as part of a horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha yagya*). A Yadav wrestler caught this horse. When Ramji told him to let the horse go, he refused. So Ramji started to fight with him. The Yadav was killed in this battle, and wherever his different limbs fell, the places became famous and people began to worship there. The Bir's torso fell here and it turned to stone. From this time it was called Kedariya Bir, and people have worshipped him. Nearby villages where the other limbs fell also contain small shrines to this Bir.

The *Calcutta Review* article identifies Kerar Bir as a "demon," the usual translation of *bīr* in this generation of literature. The story itself does not indicate the ethnic or social identity of the "demon's" followers.

Subsequent paragraphs, however, suggest that the Bir may have been a Bhar clan deity. This article points out the existence of Bhars in the area, and their association with variations of the name Kerara. If Kerar or Kedariya Bir began his career as a Bhar deity or deified hero, his more recent identity as a Yadav might indicate his adoption and redesignation by other peoples, as many revivified shrines of doubtful or vague origin are today. It is also possible that certain sections of Bhars may have themselves become Ahirs, bringing their tribal god with them. There is evidence that a subcaste of Ahirs--the Bharonia Ahirs, as their name suggests--were once aboriginal Bhars.[4]

The present temple site of Kedariya Bir was renovated in 1959 with a donation from a wealthy Jaunpur family in gratitude for help received from the Bir. The "Baba" is said to have appeared to a family member instructing him to build the temple. The fallen image, resembling a headless human torso, still rests at the base of the ruins of an old fort. Outside the small temple there are three large fire pits (<u>havan</u> <u>kuṇḍ</u>) where, says a Pujari, "such a big fire offering is performed on Agahan Panchami, Chhathi and Satami (the 5th, 6th and 7th days of Agahan) that the fires burn for the rest of the month." Pilgrims also come in great

numbers during the months of Kartik and Shravan, or on the full moon days (pūrṇamāsī)[5]. The Pujari says of the pilgrims:

> They come great distances--from Allahabad, Ghazipur, Sultanpur, Kanpur, Varanasi, etc. They offer flower garlands, sweets, cannabis, liquor, coconuts, and the sacrifice of male goats, cocks and rams. People bothered by ghosts come. All castes leave the bridegroom's ceremonial crown at the temple after a wedding. Healers (ojhā-sokhā) bring patients from surrounding villages.

Typical of broken images of this kind, the stories told about the Bir account for the shape and condition of the stone image in Jaunpur as well as others in nearby villages. This scattering-of-limbs motif is reminiscent of the mythological dismemberment of the Goddess as Sati and the establishment of the Shakta Pithas, each limb becoming a major "seat" of Devi worship.[6] It is also interesting that the contemporary story does not argue with the identification of the Bir as an enemy of Rama. Perhaps, like the 'demon' of Pishach Mochan Temple described above, the Bir was redeemed and granted his authority by virtue of this altercation with a more powerful god. The Calcutta Review author also mentions the story as a parable about the conquest of aborigines by an "Aryan invader."

<u>Bachau Bir: the making of a contemporary Bir Baba</u>

The story of Bachau Bir is an excellent example of how people perceive the coming into existence of a deity known as Bir Baba, in this case through the martyrdom of a local hero. Bachau Yadav was an historical individual who lived in a small village outside of Varanasi, who met a violent death at the hands of caste enemies. The estimates of informants and certain details of the story place the critical incidents of the tale during the 1920´s. There is no doubt much truth to the accounts of his death, but more important than the determination of historical accuracy is an appreciation of the mythology surrounding this figure, now represented by a tall, conical symbol in a small roadside temple. Many people in the city knew some version of Bachau´s story, but it was told with particular vehemence by members of the Ahir caste. The existence of a <u>birahā</u> song, written by a local Ahir songwriter about the climactic events which resulted in Bachau´s death, no doubt contributed to the ability of informants to relate the story in such vivid detail. The great-nephew of the hero tells other stories about his locally famous relative:[7]

> Bachau Yadav was an Ahir who was very brave and strong. He was a wrestler and carried a fighting staff (<u>dandā</u>) so big that no one could lift it. He had the strength and power of ten men. He was honorable, and would

> always deal with his enemies fairly. He would never fight anyone who was defenseless. If ever he saw that someone was in trouble he would help him. His "liver" (kalejā) was bigger than anyone's; it weighed 14 pau.
>
> When Bachau was a young man, he fought with a tiger. The tiger came out of the jungle to the east of Sir Govardhanpur, and chased Gokal Chaudhari, the village headman. The headman, out of fear, climbed a tree and began to shout for help. Everyone else ran away, but Bachau Yadav caught the tiger in his arms and began to beat it. He called to the other villagers, "Will you wait for the tiger to eat me before you will come?" So the village people came and started to beat the tiger. Bachau killed this tiger, and the authorities later gave him a reward.
>
> Bachau had many enemies, especially among the Thakurs. He had a long-standing feud with Riddhi and Siddhi Singh--the two sons of Ambe Singh--and Babua Singh, who was a wrestler. He had also made an enemy of Gudari Mama, who was an associate of Bachau from a Yadav jāti. Gudari Mama killed his brother's wife for no reason, so Bachau had him "outcasted" (samāj se nikāl diyā). The headman whom Bachau saved from the tiger outcasted Gudari Mama on Bachau's word. This ended his eating, drinking, smoking the hukkā, etc., with the Yadavs. Gudari Mama did not accept this social punishment and perform the appropriate expiation, but met with Bachau's Thakur enemies and schemed to take revenge upon him.

This account serves as a prelude to the birahā about the hero presented in Part 3.3 below. Bachau's enmity with the Thakurs was to come to a tragic end. On the fatal day his caste enemies joined forces with the hostile Thakur gang and they beat the defenseless man to death.

The particulars of the construction of Bachau

Yadav´s shrine are unclear and further obscured by the hagiography that inspires the _birahā_ song and other, especially Ahir, renderings of the tale. The song concludes that Bachau attained the "Heaven of Heroes" (_bīr gati_) immediately upon his death. Those who share this view are likely to refer to the shrine as a _yādgār_ or "memorial" established to honor and remember the hero. At the same time Bachau´s great-nephew tells that the wife of Babua Singh--one of Bachau´s enemies--began to light lamps at the place where the hero died even before any shrine was built, ostensibly to appease Bachau´s angry ghost. The shrine itself was built by Bachau´s family, who may have been similarly contacted by the spirit of their slain kinsman. Local people blame the more recent troubles that have visited Bachau´s family--including the madness of a grandson--on their periodic neglect of the shrine. Thus Bachau is believed to have "bothered" (_tang karnā_) both friends and enemies after his death, necessitating acts of ritual propitiation, including the establishment of a _sthān_.

Although there appears to be a certain tension between the ideas that Bachau´s shrine is both a memorial for a hero (_yādgār_) and a "seat" or propitiatory shrine for an angry ghost (_sthān_), it is

more a matter of the emphasis placed upon the story by its different tellers. South Asian folk traditions have consistently blurred the distinction between ghost and hero, treating them as two aspects of a single phenomenon. In the case of the Birs, it matters little if the figure is said to have fallen out of a tree, struck by lightning, killed by a tiger, or slain in pursuance of a nobler cause. The common element remains the tragedy of a life cut short, and a death somehow extraordinary, unnatural or uncanny, as well as heroic or sacrificial. A figure who dies in a manner far more ambiguous than did Bachau is still a potential subject for deification as a "hero." In Bachau's case, the elements of the bhūt-pret complex are clear: the young man's death was violent and unjust, the type of death an angry ghost is likely to avenge. Yet his Ahir eulogizers, themselves perpetuating a long tradition of Ahir heroism, choose to hyperbolize the strength, bravery and nobility of their hero, even to the point of making use of the classical concept of bīr gati to describe the fate of their castemate. This particular blending of heroic themes and ideas about the behavior of ghosts is characteristic of the Bir phenomenon.

Now, his great-nephew says, Bachau does not bother anyone. He is worshipped as a deity (devatā ke rūp mẽ

pūjate hain), and acts for the welfare of all. When people come to him with special desires, they are always fulfilled. The modest brick building that houses Bachau Bir's memorial faces the Banaras Hindu University wall where he is said to have fallen in flight from his enemies. The shrine is mainly attended by people from villages in the immediate area. Bachau Bir is not the Dih or guardian deity of a village (an older Bir shrine serves this function), but is the special patron of certain castes, especially the Ahir. The Annual Decoration Ceremony at the small temple is held on the day of Govardhan Puja, another festival historically linked to the Cowherd caste. While the Bir's following remains somewhat localized, there is always the potential for expansion of the cult in the manner of our next example.

Bechu Bir

The simple, conical shrine of Bechu Bir is located in the countryside about 6 kilometers from the town of Aharaura, Mirzapur. The enormous annual Mela of this deity is described for the reader in Part 1.3 above. The stories told about the Bir are embellishments upon the essential fact of his death by tiger attack and the subsequent death of his wife. An example is the

following, told by a Banaras merchant who has been a pilgrim to the Bir´s shrine.[8]

> Bechu Bir was an Ahir who was a farmer. His wife had just delivered a child, and was in her twelve days of confinement. Bechu, taking a cow as an offering, went into the jungle. A tiger came out of the jungle and attacked him. Bechu fought the tiger with his life, but was killed. When news of this reached his wife, she went to him in the jungle. There the tiger killed her also. Bechu Bir´s wife died several furlong from where he died. Both of their shrines were built separately.

The birahā song of Bechu Bir--given in Part 3.3 below--is another variation of this story. Written by an Ahir songwriter, it elaborates upon the heroic qualities of the Bir and his wife. In this latter version, the tiger is a friend of the hero (who is killed by a bear), and burns himself along with Bechu´s wife on the funeral pyre of the slain hero.

The present site of Bechu Bir contains at least two other shrines--conical mounds on raised cautarā--which are separate from the shrine of the Bir. Oral tradition accounts for this by identifying one as representing the Bir´s wife (a Sati in some versions), and the other the tiger. Insiders, however, admit to more pragmatic reasons for the number of shrines. They say that the original cautarā was built by the family of the Bir in a nearby village, and was attended by Bechu´s descendents for several generations. At some point, for reasons

obscure to the writer, control over the shrine was transferred to a clan of aboriginal Kols--a group long inhabiting this area--who are now mostly settled farmers. The shrine was moved to its present location, after which time the Bir´s Mela rapidly gained in popularity no doubt encouraged by its present caretakers. In more recent times a third shrine was constructed by an individual in an apparent attempt to divert some of the lucrative Mela activity away from the main shrine.[9] Many pilgrims now consider this the wife´s or the tiger´s shrine.

Our Banaras merchant explains the attraction of the site and the reason for its growth in popularity.[10]

> Some time later [after the death of the Bir], women who were troubled by ghosts came into the area where Bechu and his wife had died. When they entered this area, their ghosts began to "play." One ghost said that "as a result of coming here and from the power of Bechu Bir, I have become satisfied." News of this incident spread very slowly throughout the region. People in neighboring villages began to go there. Those who have been "caught" by ghosts go for the darśan of both Bechu and his wife. The ghosts will take possession of a person and will speak through that person´s mouth, telling what it requires to leave the patient to make her/him well: "I want cloth, vermillion, cannabis, liquor," they ask for these things. The ghost is given these things and the patient becomes well. Women who do not have children also make a vow to Bechu Bir. They will promise to return and offer something if they have children. About 90% of the people who go there accomplish their goals.

The tale of Bechu Bir appears to be one variation of a more widespread cycle of related stories about untimely death by tiger attack circulated throughout the Mirzapur area of Uttar Pradesh and contiguous portions of western Bihar and West Bengal. Expressions of fear, fascination, and preoccupation with tigers and other wild jungle animals are found in the folklore and ritual of aboriginals and village Hindus throughout the subcontinent, the Ahir Bir stories being one expression of this. In spite of the Kols now acting as the caretakers and shareholders of the main shrine of Bechu Bir, the Ahir origins of this deity are clear. There are large numbers of Ahirs living in southern Mirzapur, and it appears that the name Aharaura derives from "Ahirwara, or the country of the Ahir."[11] An exploration of the Ahir version of the Bir cult will be the subject of the third part of this work.

It is difficult to say what it is in particular about this Bir that makes the shrine a place of pilgrimage for so many thousands of people, or what is the cause of such a massive increase in attendance within the last few decades. There is nothing very unusual about Bechu Bir's story. Many local shrines are associated with this motif of death by tiger attack, the details of individual sites often a posteriori creations

or elaborations after a revelation of power has occurred. The Kol caretakers themselves deny any real part in the promotion of the shrine; they have merely organized themselves as best as possible to reap the rewards. One is tempted to see the Bechu Bir Mela as an example of the incredible mobilizing power of rumor and testimony, and the tremendous preoccupation with deities proven to be thus "awake." This writer witnessed other examples of the rapidity with which news of a new ritual or miraculous cure might be spread. This process is no doubt aided in modern times by various forms of mass media (the account of the Bechu Bir Mela given in Part 1.3 begins with newspaper articles describing the fair), but the relative speed of the dissemination of news by more traditional means is also impressive. The numbers of pilgrims at the Bechu Bir shrine on the Mela day are staggering--especially for an outsider to witness--but are not really so overwhelming when compared with the countless other religious Melas and pilgrimage sites of this densely populated country. Because the popularity of this type of deity has no orthodox legitimation and is based solely upon testimony and the snowball effect of large attendance, one should not be surprised if the next few decades witness a leveling off of pilgrims, or a drastic decline in favor of some new manifestation.

There is always the possibility that in time internal developments or widening sponsorship (the Bir is patronized covertly by a small number of middle class urbanites) will bring about new forms of legitimation: a proper temple and priesthood, a written text, identification with a more universal god. All these things are theoretically possible, but are always counterbalanced by self-limiting factors such as the shrine´s rustic and low caste identification and the inconstant confidence of pilgrims.

NOTES

2.5 BIR BABAS

1 "_ḍyoṛhī lagnā_: _ḍyoṛhī par aisā dwārpāl baithnā jo binā āgyā pāye logõ ko andar na jāne de_/" ("A doorkeeper is seated on the threshold so that no one may enter without permission.") Shyam Sundardas, ed., _Hindī Śabdsāgar_ (Vārānasī: Kāsī Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā, 1965), II, 478.

2 Reprinted in _North Indian Notes and Queries_, II, No. 1 (April 1892), entry 2.

3 From an interview with a Pujari of the Kedariya Bir Temple conducted by O.P. Sharma in March, 1983.

4 William Crooke writes that "In Oudh [the Ahir] appear to have been early, probably aboriginal, inhabitants before the Rajput invasion. They are also said to be closely connected with the Bhars, and they attend at great numbers on the occasion of a fair at Dalmau in the Rae Bareli district held in honor of the Bhar hero Dal ..." _The Tribes and Castes of the North-western Provinces and Oudh_, (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1896), I, 52. Alexander Cunningmam expands upon this connection between the Ahirs and Bhars:

> The legend of Dalmau refers to the foundation of the fort to Raja Dal. There were two brothers, Dal and Bal, Ahirs, who were in the habit of drinking too much wine, more especially in the month of Phalgun. One of the Sharki kings of Jaunpur, said by some to be Muhammad Shah, accordingly attacked the fort in that month, when the two brothers were drunk, and killed both of them. Then the wives of Dal and Bal prayed that the fort might be turned upside down. At once the fort was overturned, and the two women then killed the Sharki king, whose tomb is at Makanpur. In the month of Bhadon an annual fair is held at Pakhraoli, 3 miles to the south-east, near a large _jhil_, when Dal and Bal are both worshipped.

> There is another version of this legend which makes Dal a Bhar chief, and refers the capture of the fort to Ibrahim Sharki; but it is the Ahirs who are said to make offerings of milk at the tomb of Dal in the month of Sravan. The Bharonia division of the Ahirs also refer the custom of their women not wearing nose-rings and glass bracelets to the commemoration of this invasion of their country. From this it would appear that the Bhars were only a sub-division of the great tribe of Ahirs.

"Report of Tours in the Gangetic Provinces from Badaon to Bihar in 1875-6 & 1877-78," Archaeological Survey of India, (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1968), XI, 60.

[5] See note 3.

[6] See D.C. Sircar, The Śākta Pīṭhas (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1973).

[7] From an interview with Makar Yadav conducted by O.P. Sharma in November, 1982.

[8] From a personal interview with Siu Murat on September 20, 1981.

[9] When such a large amount of money is involved, there is certain to be some controversy over shareholder's rights. The year this writer attended the Bechu Bir Mela (1981) a dispute over the handling and division of proceeds resulted in one faction urging the authorities to confiscate almost all of the money offerings. It is not known how the conflict was resolved.

[10] See note 8.

[11] M.A. Sherring, Hindu Castes and Tribes (London, 1872; rpt, Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1974), I, 381-2.

2.6 The Bir and the Rural Pantheon: Conclusions

This presentation of the deified dead in the rural pantheon of the Varanasi area gives us a broader context in which to view the Banaras Birs. The oral traditions convey something of the distinctiveness of each type: the Brahm cycles are much more involved with suicide, protest, and posthumous retribution; the martial figures share a heroic stubbornness in the face overwhelming odds, the theme of death on or before the wedding night and wild animal attack; the Sati embodies a transcendent self-sacrifice. But we also see that as embodied deities the various types are not altogether unique: they share many characteristics and functions with other local gods. The power of the Brahm, the Shahid, the Bir, the Sati and Bhavani derive in one sense from their unique natures or acts, influencing how they are perceived as deities, yet in other ways these distinctions blur and what remains is simply the fact of power manifest at the site of a shrine, its origin and nature subordinated to its efficacy. The Mantras demonstrate the prominence of these figures in the rural pantheon as troublesome spirits, family, caste and village deities, and regional gods whose temples are

centers of exorcism and wish fulfillment.

The many forms of ´possession´ are visible in the cults of these gods. Lower forms "bother" (satānā, tang karna) the living through possession and are "quieted" or removed. Others "reveal" their presence and desire for worship through possession, speak through their oracular priests to communicate with the living, assist healers in their efforts to cure or exorcise a patient, "come to" their worshippers as a culmination of sādhana or devotion. The most powerful figures do not possess, but exert their greater authority over minor deities and spirits. In a very general sense, one might say that the lower orders of these beings are more malevolent and higher orders more benevolent, but there is ambivalence throughout.

All the figures discussed are or may be represented by aniconic mounds, pegs, or posts: Satis, Bhavanis, Matas, Dih Babas (one primary meaning of ḍīh being "mound"), the Panchon Pir, Brahms, Birs, Ascetics, etc. Most of these are accompanied by a trident (hand or spear in the case of the Muslim deities) and flags. In some cases these aniconic forms mark the site of entombment or burial, in others physiological or other ´relics´ are buried beneath. The burial of objects at the site of these shrines is common, and takes a number

of different forms. Crooke´s illustration (discussed in the context of the Dih in Part 1.4 above) of the mound deities which actualize the establishment of a village is fundamental:

> In Central Panjab the Jathera may be dedicated to a progenitor of the clan, the founder of the village, any prominent member of it, or to a Sati who died with her husband. ... When a village is founded a mound is raised and near it a Jand tree is planted; the first man who dies, whatever his caste may be, is buried or burnt on this mound, and a shrine is dedicated to him as the village guardian.

At work here is both the memorialization of a prominent person or ancestor as symbolic of the incorporated village and the ritual creation of a village guardian deity. The latter is just a hair´s breadth from the sacrifice of an individual--perhaps the live burial--in order to secure a spirit´s guardianship of a place or structure. The list of Maris in the second Mantra is eloquent on this account. Chhatariya Bir (near Sitala Ghat) is also said to have become a deity in this manner. Planalp´s third Brahm example (Part 2.4) is a slightly different use of burial beneath a mound. A protesting Brahman allows his hair and nails to grow long; before his death, he instructs his grandson to bury the cuttings of hair and nails, build a mound over them, and make offerings to this shrine in order to "awaken" and impel his spirit to inflict ill upon their

enemies. This reminds one of other techniques of ´sorcery´ practiced by the Ojha and his kind. More common is the burial of offerings beneath the shrine of a village deity like a Dih Baba--described in Part 1.5 above--in order to appease the angry god, secure permission or curry its favor.

Many of the deified dead are family or household deities. We have discussed how Bhavanis and Gazi Miyan (and the Panchon Pir) were worshipped by low caste Hindus in the home in an almost identical manner. Rural Brahman families may have brahm-asthān within their residential compounds, and many Birs are first established as family shrines.[1] Other propitiatory sthān are built away from inhabited areas to remove the presence of the spirit. These shrines may become the objects of worship by others beyond the locality, kin or caste group. Some have a speciality: Tar Bir (Lanka) and Daitra Bir (Chait Ganj) are said to remove a "hand trembling" disease, Kolhua Bir (Saraynandan) cures stomach problems, Siha Bir (Ramnagar) assists with tantric ritual. Other deities may cure dog or snake bite, or a certain kind of children´s disease. A rural Ahir Bir is likely to become a deity of cattle health and fertility; others protectors of crops and fields. Birs and Muslim deities in particular become village

guardian deities; the former often paired with a Sati or local goddess. Great respect is given to an older shrine, more so if its origin is beyond recall or dimly conceived. When a sthān (with image or imageless) begins to outlive human memory, its aura of mystery and venerability increases.

Some of these shrines attain the status of regional pilgrimage centers. Certain specialities aside, the temples of Brahm Babas, Bir Babas, and the mazārs or dargāhs of Pir and Shahid draw equally those hopeful of exorcism, blessing or cure. Professional healers bring patients, reaffirm their relationship with the deity, and renew their powers. The activity at these sites is remarkable in its similarity.

The role of Bhut Nath (and its equivalents) is common to the deified dead: spiritual guardians of specific territories the extent of which is commensurate with their power. The Dihs are one level Bhut Nath; the regional shrines of Brahm, Shahid and Bir more inclusive powers. The archetypal Lord of Ghosts is probably Shiva himself, who mythologically sports with his ghostly entourage at the cremation ground.[2] In Varanasi, the primary manifestation of this aspect of Shiva is the liṅga at the main burning ground (Manikarnika Ghat), dubbed "Mashan Nath" (Hindi masān from Sanskrit

śmaśāna), "Lord of the Cremation Ground" or its spirit inhabitants (also called maśān or masān). This cremation ground, especially on the night of Diwali and the other calendrical amāvasyās (last day of the dark fortnight),[3] is the scene of intensive tantric activity when Ojhas and other "left-handed" practitioners come to the ghāṭ to acquire and renew their powers. This is a critical time and place for an Ojha to initiate a disciple, or for an aspiring practitioner to "awaken" his Mantra (mantra masān jagānā) in the most conducive of settings. Shiva as Mashan Nath oversees these activities, and receives the offerings of his devotees and aspirants in the tantric science. Some tantric healers claim to have seduced powerful cremation ground spirits (masān) to come away with them and act as helpmates in their practice of exorcism and divination. A cremation ground spirit is then called the healer's Masan Baba.[4] The Shaivite association with lordship over spirits extends to the various Bhairavas of the city. Originally independent deities, the Bhairavas were incorporated into the Shaivite pantheon as minions or gaṇas of Shiva, later promoted as quasi-independent guardians of the several regions (kṣetras) of Kashi and identified as aspects of Shiva.[5] Kal Bhairava, especially, is famous as the "Police Chief" (kotwāl) of

Banaras, and is represented by a mask fronting a rough stone not unlike the iconography of Lahura Bir, one of the city's best known Bir Babas. The Kal Bhairava temple is an orthodox center of priestly exorcism and protection from the troubles caused by spirit agents and other inauspicious forces (magic, evil eye, bad planets), one interpretation of the deity's mythological reputation as a remover of sins.[6] The priests of this temple routinely perform a brief exorcism ritual on all pilgrims to the shrine, the "sweeping" away (jhāṛnā) of all evil from the body with a peacock feather whisk or fan (morchal). The pilgrim is assured further protection if he wears a special knotted black thread, obtained at the temple, that is activated by Mantras (abhimantrit kālā gaṇḍā). The Bhairavas represent an older generation of guardian deity in Varanasi, and perhaps have served as unconscious models for the more recent Bir temples.

Regional temples of the Goddess are also part of this type of ritual activity. Vindhyacal Devi (southern Mirzapur) is mobbed during the two annual Nav Ratras with those seeking blessing or darśan and specialists anxious to renew their contact with the Devi and ritually empower their Mantras. The ancillary shrines of Kali Khoh and Baba Bhut Nath are awash with the

possessed, their escorts and their healers.

Deified female spirits and disembodied witches are quite readily identified with more ambivalent forms of the Goddess or the goddesses of disease. The second Mantra lists "Seven Sisters Bhavani, Seven Mari, Seven Witches," as the ubiquitous "Seven Mothers." The Chaura Mai and Sayar Mai of many villages have a more beneficient presence, and may be identified with the Goddess Durga. The more fluid and all-encompassing nature of the Goddess aids in this type of identification, often obscuring the origin of a goddess as deified dead. There is no analogous situation among the masculine deities. One might speculate that the <u>liṅga</u>-like shape of the aniconic image might encourage the identification of the Bir or Brahm with Shiva, but I have seen no consistent evidence of this.

Tradition identifies the deified dead as memorialized ancestors, saints, religious teachers, heroes, heroines, "perfected" Yogis and other adepts of the magico-tantric arts, and those enshrined and propitiated for the violent, untimely, disturbing, uncanny, sacrificial, dubious or unjust nature of their deaths. As deities they are "awake" although restricted in their authority, and may substitute for each others in various ways. The Bir Babas must be considered as belonging to

this large class with whom they share many characteristics. Having demonstrated the kinship of the deified dead as a class, we will turn again to the Birs as a distinct subset and examine the most articulated Bir tradition in the Varanasi region: that of the Ahir or ´Cowherd´ caste.

NOTES

2.6 THE BIR AND THE RURAL PANTHEON: CONCLUSIONS

[1] I saw little evidence of Bir worship within the home or family compound. This entry in North Indian Notes and Queries [III, No. 1 (June 1893), entry 85] about the domestic worship of Karar (Kedariya) Bir is interesting in this regard:

> Karar Bir--The principal seat of this deity is in Jaunpur, near the fort. There is a raised platform of masonry, and on it a stone idol, which is believed to be Karar Bir. This deity is worshipped by Kewats, Lohars, Chamars, Khatiks, Mallahs, Ahirs, Garariyas, and many other castes. It is not necessary that worshippers perform the worship at the shrine of the deity. They generally worship him at their houses. Some castes worship once a year and others once after every three years. Some worship only when the deity realizes their desires. Those who worship at home do so at noon. No idol is kept. In the courtyard of the house a piece of ground is plastered, and on that pigs or sheep and goats are offered. They also offer him a libation of wine. The worshippers offer as sacrifices only those animals the flesh of which they can eat. No musical instrument is played and no song is sung.

[2] For Shiva´s demonic nature and role as Lord of Ghosts, see Stella Kramrisch, The Presence of Śiva (New Jersey: Princeton, 1981), pp. 395-7.

[3] The favored times given for these esoteric initiations were reported as Dipawali Amavasya (Kartik Kr. 30), Mauni Amavasya (Magh Kr. 30), during a lunar or solar eclipse, or on any Ekadashi night. The favored place is the cremation ground, but any isolated place will do. On the symbolism and meaning of Amavasya, see John M. Stanley, "Special Time, Special Power: The Fluidity of Power in a Popular Hindu Festival," Journal of Asian Studies, XXXVII, No. 1 (November 1977), 27-43.

[4] Lal Baba, now deceased, of the small Kauri Mata temple worked with one such Mashan Baba in his practice

of healing and divination. His clients would submit questions to the Baba and the answers would be written in ash on a special sannyāsin's skull.

5 See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva (Oxford, 1973), pp. 123-7; Kramrisch, Presence, pp. 250-300; Diana L. Eck, Banaras: City of Light (New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1982), pp. 189-95.

6 See Eck, Banaras, pp. 190-5, and Elizabeth-Chalier Visuvalingam, "Bhairava: Kotwāl of Vārāṇasī," in Varanasi Through the Ages (Varanasi: Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Samiti, 1986).

7 Vaikunthnath Upadhyaya, Śrī Kāśī Khaṇḍ (Vārāṇasī: Bhrigu Prakāshan, Samvat 2024), Chapters 30/31, pp. 40-1 [in Hindi].

PART 3

THE AHIR TRADITION OF THE BIR

3.1 Ahir Birs

As my research on the Banaras Bir Babas progressed, an interesting piece of information was repeatedly offered by informants: a majority of the Birs surveyed were said to be from the Ahir caste, the traditional occupation of which is the keeping and breeding of cows and buffalo, and providing the milk of these animals.[1] This connection with the Ahir also surfaced in general conversation about Birs in the city and elsewhere: people from a variety of castes would tell me that "all Birs are Ahir." Such an inclusive statement as to the Birs´ identity was never made about any other caste. The Ahir identification with the Bir cult was continually asserted, especially when one began talking to members of the Cowherd _jāti_ and other middle-to-low castes with whom the Ahirs are found in village settings. Ahirs are also conspicuous in the patronage and celebration of Bir shrines. Aspiring Yadav politicians and merchants help finance neighborhood Bir temples, and Ahir _birahā_ singers are invited to perform

at Annual Decoration ceremonies. It became clear in the course of fieldwork that while not <u>all</u> Birs are identified as belonging to the Ahir <u>jāti</u>, a great many of them are, and the Ahir version of the cult is by far the most coherent and articulated tradition.

Many would group these Ahir Birs together in sets of two, five, seven, or nine--generally the shrines in the locality--as being Yadav brothers who "were saints," or who died in some past battle. The number ´seven´ was reported most often as a unit of Bir brothers. The Birs on Banaras Hindu University campus listed by one individual were "seven Yadav brothers who died fighting the Thakurs in conflicts over land, during the time of the Angrezi Raj."[2] Another elderly man from Kapildhara--a village outside of Varanasi--named seven Birs from nearby villages and said about them: "All of these are located on the bank of the Ganga. They are seven brothers. They are all Ahir."[3] Very often the Ahir identification of a particular Bir Baba is the only piece of information given by the neighbors of a shrine, and the name Ahira Bir may be encountered more than once. Even more intriguing are the incidences when the Cowherd identification of a Bir Baba at a particular temple seems incongruous with that institution´s character and priesthood. This is true of Varanasi´s

familiar Lahura Bir Temple, located next to the busy intersection of the same name. The parents of the current priest-caretakers (pujārīs) were Nath Sadhus from the Gorakhnath sampradāya or sect, and the present generation continues to maintain a relationship with the ashram in Gorakhpur and the lineage of their parents´ guru. The samādhis of these deceased parents lie in the temple courtyard to one side of the Lahura Bir shrine, two low mounds set in cement and glazed with layers of bright orange sindūr. Given the sectarian background of the resident priests, one would expect that Lahura Bir might be identified as some prominent member of the Gorakhnath order, especially in view of the conflation of Sadhu and Bir in the minds of many throughout the city. But this is not the case. I was told by the temple´s head Pujari that Lahura Bir was one of seven brothers--including Kedariya Bir in distant Jaunpur--who died fighting at the time of the Mahabharata War. He said that the shrine is 3-4 thousand years old (!), and the deity was originally a Gwal or Ahir.[4] In this case the Ahir identification of the Bir is remembered and passed on even when the speaker is not wholly aware of its significance. Nor is the Lahura Bir Pujari the only individual to report this Bir´s Ahir identity; versions of this story are repeated by others throughout the

city. One learned Brahman Pandit tells it in this way:[5]

> Three or four-hundred years ago there was an Ahir who was a wrestler and who worshiped Hanuman. He could cross the Ganga in one jump. He helped many people. Eventually he became an ascetic. After his death his family began to worship him; then his relatives, then others. This is the way the worship of such shrines grows.

The teller himself knows the story even though he does not approve of the growth of the cult or accept the Birs as deities (*devatā*). Other examples of Ahir Bir Babas are given in Part 2.5 above: Jaunpur's Kedariya Bir; Bechu Bir near Aharaura, Mirzapur; and Bachau Bir located just outside Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi.

The Ahirs themselves--especially those living in the countryside or otherwise in touch with the caste's rustic traditions--explain the preponderance of Ahir Birs in this way: All Ahirs [male] who die violent and untimely deaths become Birs. Members of other castes become ghosts/deities of different sorts: Brahman become Brahm, Nat (nomadic acrobats and wrestlers) become Pahalwan, Chamars become Chamardokh, etc.; Ahirs become Birs. Behind this explanation lies the conviction that Ahirs are a martial race equal in stature to the Thakur or the Pathan. Put another way, Ahirs *and other Kshatriyas* who died violent, heroic deaths became Birs.

Some Ahir informants are willing to admit that any especially brave or devoted person who dies heroically might become a Bir, but the fact remains that Ahirs are inherently heroic.[6] The Ahir's self-image and status among a collection of middle-to-low castes as brave heroes and fighters, whether based upon an older, tribal tradition or more recent Yadava Movement philosophy, is the subject of the next few chapters.

The frequent association of members of the Ahir caste with the Bir cult is also supported by secondary sources. Planalp reports that many of the 'godlings' in Senapur (Jaunpur District, U.P.) and nearby villages are Ahir in origin, an identity upheld by local oral history which records one subcaste of Ahirs (the Dharhor) to be the original settlers of the area before the incursion of the now dominant Thakurs.[7] Many entries written or compiled by William Crooke in North Indian Notes and Queries, such as the following, also register this connection.

> 1:2 (May 1891) 157. Mirzapur - Local Gods - Gulal Bir. In the village of Lacchmanpur, near Bhuili, is the shrine of Gulal Bir. It consists of a few stones under a Sihor and Nim tree. Gulal was an Ahir by caste, who died in some remarkable way, of which the story is now lost. He turned into a bīr or malignant ghost, and is occasionally propitiated with offerings of flowers, Brahmanical cords and etc.

3:3 (June 1893) 85. Ahīra Bīr - The original seat of this deity is in the village of Aibakpur Mohana, pargana Haweli, Chunar. Here stands a Pakar tree, under which is a raised platform. No idol is placed there. The Hindus worship this deity when an epidemic rages among the cattle and when by the mercy of the godling it ceases to prevail. The Ahirs and other tribes who keep cattle worship this deity yearly. An Ahir officiates as priest at the worship. They offer him pithār (coarse flour of barley or bājrā) weighing 1 1/4 seers, ghī, treacle, and an earthen pot (kulhar) full of water. The offerings are taken by the officiating priest. This worship is not performed after births and marriages. No particular month is fixed for the worship of this godling. Some, who can afford it, offer also the sacrifice of goats and rams. If the worshipper is a Hindu who eats the flesh of the animal killed by a single stroke (jhatka), he will make the sacrifice himself, and if he eats the flesh of an animal killed by cutting the throat, he makes the sacrifice through the Dafāli or Muhammadan drummer. The worshippers themselves consume the objects of sacrifice with the members of the family. The worship can be done only on Mondays from morning to noon. They also offer a little wine as a libation, and drink it themselves in excess. Enquiry shows that Ahīra Bīr in life-time was an Ahir and after death he appeared in a dream before another Ahir and told him that he would protect their cattle if, in consideration of this service of his, they would make offerings of the things above-mentioned. His real name could not be ascertained even from the oldest Ahirs. The worship of this deity is never performed except when he puts an end to cattle disease. No musical instrument is played, nor songs sung at the time of worship.

3:1 (April 1893) 2. Mirzapur - Worship of Birnath. In parts of the Agori pargana, which is the only part of the district in which I have seen this worship, you will meet on the side of the roads here and there a little platform (chaura) with one, three or five rude

> wooden images, about three feet high, with a sort of representation of a human face and head at the top. The posts are quite black with oil or ghī, which is continually poured upon them. This is the shrine of Bīrnāth, the Ahīr god of cattle. He was an Ahīr who, according to some, was killed by a tiger, and he has now become a god, and is worshipped by Ahirs who own cattle. People make occasional vows to him in time of sickness or distress, but his special function is to keep the cattle safe from beasts of prey. He has no fixed feast-day, but is occasionally presented with offerings of rice, milk and cakes. The worshipper first bathes, then plasters the mud platform of the god on which he lays the offering, and says: 'Bīrnāth, keep our cattle safe and you will get more.' This worship is always done in the morning, and more particularly when the cattle are sent into the jungle in the hot weather, or when cattle-disease is prevalent ... (Papers relating to the Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces, pp. 15,16).
>
> 1:2 (Feb. 1892) 1097. Parsuar--Palhu Baba. The story of Palhu Baba is that he was an Ahīr. One day he was grazing his cattle when a sambhar stag came among the herd. The herdsmen caught the stag and Palhu rode away on it. He was cut to pieces among the thorns, and his little finger was cut off and fell in the village of Parsuar, in the place where his shrine now exists.

Other references to Ahir Birs may be found in this generation of gazetteers, archaeological and census reports, often identified as Ahir cattle deities. Birnath, above, is another name for Bir Kuar described by Archer.

Bir Kuar

Without doubt the most extensive discussion of the

Ahir Bir cult in Northern India is W.G. Archer´s The Vertical Man: A Study in Primitive Indian Sculpture. Essentially a study in art history, Archer manages to compile and analyze a respectable amount of data concerning the images, oral traditions, and worship of the "cattle-deity" of the Kishnaut Ahirs of Western Bihar--Bir Kuar. Archer felt this contextual information essential in understanding the sensibility behind stark and haunting forms taken by the images of this deity. Although somewhat naive about relevant aspects of the Hindu religious tradition, and ultimately deferring to a mode of analysis unhelpful to us here--involving the "will to vital geometry" as discussed in a 1937 study of English medieval sculpture[8]--he must be appreciated for a careful investigation of a widespread and visible ´folk´ cult which had been all but ignored by other chroniclers.

Archer found the images of Bir Kuar scattered throughout portions of the Shahabad, Gaya and Palamau Districts of Bihar, a region continuous with the Uttar Pradesh districts where Bir worship is known by this writer to exist. But the Bihar Bir cult displays some distinctive characteristics which are no doubt influenced by regional cultural idioms. The principle deity found in the open-air field shrines is always Bir

Kuar rather than a collection of miscellaneous figures memorialized for various reasons at different points in village history. What is localized is the identity of the second figure with whom Bir Kuar is often paired--a servant, a companion, a brother, his wife (a Sati); attempts, I believe, to deal with a pre-existing custom of establishing two posts for an untimely death.[9] Other aspects of the cult of Bir Kuar--such as the offering of clay horses and the form of the wooden images--are particular to the Bihar cultural region which has a large tribal population. Many other aspects of the cult are familiar: the club-wielding stance of the deity, Bir Kuar´s role as protector, fulfiller of wishes and granter of fertility, and oral traditions exhibiting familiar variations and elaborations on the theme of the hero´s untimely death and deification. A summary of the text of the Bir Kuar songs translated by Archer is given in Part 3.3 below.

At the time of his research, Archer found that Bir Kuar was worshipped by the Ahirs primarily to insure the fertility of cattle (as the deity was able to cause "she-buffaloes to come on heat"), and for the protection cattle from disease and tiger attack.[10] But he also gives examples of Bir Kuar´s larger role in certain localities:[11]

> ... just as throughout the area there are villages where his powers seem slightly more general, one also finds occasional villages where bargains are made to cover illness in the family or failure of crops, and in one village ... a bargain had even been made for obtaining a child.

Bir Kuar is also a protector of people, as witnessed by the following song in Archer's collection:[12]

> O Bir Kuar baba
> I remember your name always
> And call upon it
> Through your strength
> I wander in the world
> Protect me.

This illustration of an Ahir cattle deity becoming more generalized in function is instructive in the case of the Birs further north. Many of the rural Bir shrines in the Banaras area no doubt originated as deities of cattle disease and protection, later to be enlisted as the Dih Babas or guardian deities of the human and animal population of many villages. The worship of Bir Kuar as described by Archer is also reminiscent of other usages further north. The basic interaction between man and god takes the form of a bakauthi or "bargain," where a formal request is made before the shrine of the deity along with a promise to honor the fulfilled wish with a costly offering (the sacrifice of a goat, etc.).[13] This process is identical to what people in the Banaras area call "manautī," mentioned several places in this work.

Kuar Bir is worshipped on special occasions by a ritual "boiling of milk",[14] which is the karāhā pūjā described by Planalp,[15] and the deity may take possession of a professional medium.

The Extent of the Ahir Bir Tradition

By the most conservative estimate, based upon my own observations and the secondary sources mentioned, the Ahir Bir tradition--the custom of the Ahir to establish memorials or sthān to "quiet" their untimely dead, and the tendency for these dead to be eulogized as heroes and elevated to the status of deities functioning as family, clan, caste, cattle, field, or village guardians, some attaining the status of regional pilgrimage sites--exists in an area which includes eastern Uttar Pradesh (Varanasi, Mirzapur, Jaunpur and Ghazipur Districts) and western Bihar (Shahabad, Palamau and Gaya Districts). References made by Crooke and others extend this area to other neighboring districts of Uttar Pradesh where the Ahir live in large numbers, and into West Bengal. In Bengal, the regional designation for the Cowherd caste is "Rawal" or "Raut." Two reports of Ahir Birs from this region are as follows:

> In Bengal Govind Rawal was a cowherd who valiantly killed many tigers. After his death

> he was deified by the Ahir or cowherd caste, and now when murrain attacks the herds he is worshipped with an offering of milk.[16]
>
> Rautra is a village of Bankura district [West Bengal] on the bank of [the] Damodar [River] ... The village is named after the house of the Rauts, the local feudal chiefs. The Rauts are said to have deserted the village when faced with the depredations of the invading Bargis or Maratha marauders from south-west India. In order to safeguard their wealth for good they buried their youngest son Bhirkoo [Birkoo?] alive together with the belongings of the family in accordance with prevailing superstitious custom of appointing a Yaksha or captivated guardian spirit. Later on, when Bhirkoo was turned into a Yaksha, the poor villagers made it a point to come to the grave of Bhirkoo with supplications as and when the occasion arose. Some of the villagers are credited with having been able to feel the presence of Bhirkoo in the course of each of their visits.[17]

In Sontheimer's Birobā, Mhaskobā und Khaṇḍobā, we find passing reference to two Bir cults in Maharastra which originated with the Gavli or Cowherd caste of that region, later to be adopted by the Dhangar (Shepherds) who replaced the Gavlis "whose herds of cattle could not be maintained on diminishing pastures." Sontheimer writes:[18]

> ...we find a number of cults which have been originally founded by Gavḷīs in conjunction with Gosāvīs as e.g. ...the Bābīr of Rui...whose bhaktas are today Dhangars, or the Masan Vīr of Vālhā, a god of the Gavḷīs--today also a god of the Dhangars.[19]

The former cult is described:

> The origin of the famous Gavḷī/Dhangar cult of Bābīr at Nhāī Rūī near Kaḷas (Indapūr Taluka) is also traced to a cowherd boy's death at the hand of Rāmosīs. After his violent death he came to be worshipped not as a simple restless spirit, but on account of his mother's worship of Śiva (or rather of the Mahādev of Siṅgṇāpūr) and Śiva's instrumentality he became a manifestation of Śiva worshipped in a famous cult and <u>jatrā</u> of the Gavḷīs and Dhangars.

In view of this, it would not be surprising to find the worship of Ahir Birs in all areas populated by Ahirs or certain subcastes of the rather large and heterogeneous group classified as Ahir. We will continue to explore the nature of this tradition in the following chapters, and attempt to shed some light on why the Ahir in particular are the carriers of such a cult in the Varanasi area.

NOTES

3.1 AHIR BIRS

1

In the Banaras region, the Ahir caste is made up of a number of endogamous sub-castes (Gwal, Dharhor, Krishnaut) which in turn are divided into various got (clans) and lineages. In Varanasi District the Gwal sub-caste of the Ahir is the most numerous. Due to the influence of the Yadava Movement, many Ahirs give their caste name as Yadav, and have also taken Yadav as their last name. This can be understood as a reference category which has inter-regional if not pan-Indian distribution. Although not all Ahirs are milkmen or farmers, the identification with cattle among the rural Ahirs remains strong.

2

Personal interview with Manna Lal Yadav on March 17, 1981.

3

Personal interview with Mali Jagannath on July 27, 1981.

4

Personal interviews with Lahura Bir Pujaris on Nov. 20, 1980 and Sept. 15, 1981.

5

Personal interview with Ram Puri Divedi on Sept. 25, 1981.

6

From interviews with Hans Raj Yadav (Sept. 20, 1981), Manna Lal Yadav (March 17, 1981), and Ram Sakal (Sept. 8, 1981).

7

Jack M. Planalp, "Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village," Diss. Cornell University 1956. Senapur and nearby villages are located about 19 miles north of Varanasi. Planalp writes that:

> The Senapur Dharhors [the minority Ahir subcaste in the village; the Gual being the majority] claim to have been the original settlers of the village at the time of Thakur conquest, and there is some indication that most of the local godlings in the area have Ahir origins. [p.69]

The Dih of Bhaura, the village immediately to the west of Senapur, is called Raut, which is the honorific title used of Ahirs. Most people believe that both Baraicha Baba [also called Baraicha Bir; note 9, p. 157] and Goraya Baba [the village Dih; one gloss on the name being Lord or Protector of Cattle; pp. 156-7] were Ahirs.

8

W.G. Archer, _The Vertical Man: A Study in Primitive Indian Sculpture_ (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1947), Preface, p.9.

9

I believe that Archer's perplexity over the offering of two images to the same deity (resulting in the great variation in identity assigned to the second image) might be clarified if one knew more about the antecedent tradition(s) upon which the erection of posts might be based. There is obviously a prior custom of establishing or offering _two_ posts to pacify an untimely death, connected perhaps with a tradition of sacrifice: the posts being equivalent to the _yūpa_ of Vedic religion. Archer himself mentions the "insertion of two pegs in the ground" when a goat is sacrificed in the Aurangabad area. "These pegs are made of _bel_ wood and are put in only when a goat is sacrificed and only when the goat is offered by an Ahir." [_Vertical_, p. 41.] There are obvious commonalities among the handling of sacrifice (including human), the pacification of an angry ghost, and memorialization of a human hero. One may find echoes of human sacrifice throughout the deified dead traditions. Anncharlott Eschmann writes that in Orissa there is a very old tradition--based on tribal usage--of deities worshipped in the form of wooden posts, the precursor of the contemporary wooden Jagannath image. She says that, "In this area, most of the tribal cults--mainly Khond--and many folk and temple cults on different levels of Hinduization are centered in wooden posts dedicated to a goddess, a feature which might have been connected with the Khond Meriah cult." ["Prototypes of the Navakalevara Ritual and Their Relation to the Jagannatha Cult," in _The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa_, eds. Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi (Delhi: Manohar, 1978), p. 267.]

10

Archer, _Vertical_, p. 25.

11

Archer, _Vertical_, p. 37.

12 Archer, _Vertical_, p. 28, song 9.

13 Archer, _Vertical_, pp. 36-37.

14 Archer, _Vertical_, p. 39.

15 A _karāhā_ is a wok-like pot. For a description of the "Karaha or Karaha Dena (To Offer the Karaha) ceremony" of the Ahir, see Planalp _Religious Life_, pp. 805-815.

16 E.A. Gait, _Census Report: Assam_ (Shillong, 1892) as quoted in William Crooke, _Religion and Folklore of Northern India_ (London, 1926; rpt. New Delhi, 1972), p. 131.

17 Bholanath Bhattacharya, "Folk Legends Centering Jain Icons in Bengal," _Folklore_, No. 4 (April, 1971), p. 125. I thank John Cort for pointing out this article.

18 Günther-Diez Sontheimer, _Birobā, Mhaskobā und Khaṇdobā: Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von Pastoralen Gottheiten in Mahārāṣṭra_ (Wiesbadan: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976), Summary, p. 248.

19 Sontheimer, _Birobā_, Summary, pp. 214-2. In addition, some local traditions of the deity Mhasoba--originally a god of the Gavlis--identify him as a deified cowherd (p. 248).

3.2 Ahir Heroism: The Yadava Movement & the Epic Loriki

As mentioned above, many North Indian Ahirs and their supporters have been influenced by the tenets of the Yadava Movement which seeks, among other things, to establish the Ahir as a bona fide martial race, twice-born Kshatriyas descended from the Yadu dynasty of Krishna. M.S.A. Rao writes that[1]

> The ideology of the Yadava movement consists of three interrelated elements, Yadava mythology, the historical evidence of political dominance by the Abhiras in different parts of India and the adoption of Arya Samaj practices.

The movement was launched during the turn of the century by the rulers of the Royal state of Rewari, members of the Yaduvamsi subcaste of Ahirs. The teachings of the Arya Samaj were impetus to the growth of the movement, which adapted these to its own agenda of caste uplift and political organization. In particular, many Ahirs adopted the "twice-born" symbol of the sacred thread in support of their claim to Kshatriya status. The <u>janeū</u> (sacred thread) movement was strong in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the 1910's and 1920's, and encountered opposition from powerful Thakurs and Bhumihar Brahmans.[2] Influenced by the revisionist histories of Ahir intellectuals,[3] many Ahirs adopted

"Yadava" as a last name, and it soon became a reference category which served to associate many diverse regional cow and buffalo-herding castes throughout the subcontinent. More recently Yadava organizations have agitated for a separate regiment in the Indian Army as have the other "martial races" of India.[4]

One must account for the influence of the Yadava Movement in the attitudes and convictions of contemporary Ahirs, but its various tenants and programs were selectively adopted by them, and served to reinforce a preexisting self image of the Ahir as a martial race.

The oldest oral expression of the Ahir heroic self-image known to us is the North Indian Hindi epic the Loriki, alternately called the Lorikayan, Loriki-Chanaini, Chanaini (or Chandaini) depending upon the particular Hindi dialect or cultural area in which it is found. There are three published versions of the epic from the area of this study, two in Bhojpuri from Banaras and Mirzapur Districts, and one in Avadhi from Allahabad District.[5] All of these are strongly identified with the Ahir caste who are the traditional performers of the epic and make up the bulk of the epic's audience.[6]

The epic world of the Loriki is a land of many

small kingdoms--Ahir, Rajput, and Aboriginal--vying for cattle, land, women, and power. It is a world in which the Ahir stand as equals to the "twice-born" warrior castes, where marriage by capture is the norm, and expressions of strength, bravery, loyalty, nobility and honor are valued. Like many other epic traditions, it is a story of a flawed hero who meets with a tragic fate. The plot revolves around the Ahir Lorik, his virtuous wife Majari (Manjari) and his lover Chanva (Chanda). At every turn in the plot major battles are fought--to secure Lorik´s and his half brother´s marriage, to protect caste honor, to win back lost wealth--with the aid of Ahir warriors, their untouchable allies, supernatural weapons, and the Goddesses Durga and Bansatti. Descriptions of the great battles take up entire chapters and are fought by ostentatiously described armies replete with horses and elephants. Yet despite his many victories, the Ahir hero pays for his pride and desertion of wife and family with the loss of his brother, wealth, and strength, and ends his life in suicide or simply disappears.

While the ´heroic´ is the dominant mood in the North Indian versions of the Loriki, it is not the only sentiment enjoyed by the epic´s audiences. S.M. Pandey writes this about audience reaction to Loriki

performances:[7]

> ... the non-heroic elements in the story are very dear to the hearts of the Ahir audience. Lorik's brother, who combines great virtue and piety with a heroic defense of Lorik's interest during his absence, appeals greatly to the audience. They shed tears at the sufferings of Lorik's deserted wife and mother, and are greatly moved at the preservation of his wife's chastity when it is threatened by a boatman. In other words we can say that there is a common emotional reaction and certain common standards of appreciation among the Ahir community to whom the hero and other important characters belong. The whole life of an Ahir hero has been described in the story. His birth, his battles, his love and his sorrows are all of great interest to an Ahir audience.

Arjundas Kesari also makes note of the moods of heroism, love and (female) virtue (vīr, prem, satī) with which the epic is saturated.[8]

Some versions--among my sources, the Avadhi and Magahi--elaborate upon the hero's supernatural birth and his identification with the Hindu deity Krishna. In the Avadhi epic, Lorik is born to his previously-barren mother after she has undertaken many years of austerities, with the help of Shiva, Parvati and Brahma. The child Lorik, who lived happily in Heaven before his birth on earth, performs many miracles along the lines of young Krishna.[9] In the Magahi versions of Lorik's birth reported by Grierson, the hero is an avatār of Krishna who must be persuaded by Durga to descend to the

world of men in order to be her servant and fight the enemies of the Ahir.[10] These mythic elements do not indicate, however, that the figure of Lorik is worshipped as a deity. Many episodes of the Loriki are localized in the various regions that know the epic, but researchers have yet to uncover evidence of Lorik´s deification in the form of image, temple or cult. This is consistent with the attitudes of contemporary Ahirs who view Lorik as first and foremost a historical hero of great stature and their most illustrious ancestor. Banaras area Ahirs consider the Loriki to be the history of their caste in which the origins of all their distinctive traditions may be traced. This conviction holds even for younger Ahirs who are not necessarily conversant with all the details of the epic. They say that Ahir worship of the goddesses Durga and Bansatti originated with Lorik, that the earliest form of the folk song genre of <u>birahā</u> is linked with this epic tradition, and that the story is a historical record of past Ahir kingdoms. Each region in which the Loriki is sung contains sites which localize the events of the epic or are associated with other exploits of its hero. The famous Sarnath Stupa outside of Banaras--called by some historians the "Dhamekh Stupa" (<u>dhamekh</u> = Hindi "a Buddhist monument or memorial")[11] --is called "Lorik´s

Dhamekh" (lorik kī dhamekh) by Banaras Ahirs. This Buddhist monument is understood to be either a memorial to Lorik (a huge sthān?) or one of the many places where Lorik displayed his superhuman strength. They say that the hero would climb up and jump off the monument in play, carrying two full buckets of milk on his way to a place called "Sita's Kitchen" (sītā kī rasoī) where the milk would be offered. Sita's Kitchen is of course the parochialized Ramayana location where Sita is said to have cooked during her forest exile. A second popular story which localizes the Lorik legend is told about a site outside of nearby Mirzapur. When Lorik went to capture his bride and take her away, she challenged his might by requesting him to break a huge stone into three pieces. He did this easily, whereupon the bride took her sindūr and marked each of the three stones. They say that these stones can be seen today outside of Mirzapur, the red marks of sindūr still fresh upon them.[12] Kesari makes note of the above stories, as well as others from the Mirzapur area. Lorik's apparent prowess in jumping has resulted in a number of sites bearing his name. "Lorik's Jump" (lorik kī kūd) on a hillside near Agori contains the footprints from another mighty leap.[13] In Mirzapur District are found "Lorik's Wrestling Ground" (lorik kā akhāṛā), where the hero

would graze his cows and wrestle opponents, and a rock in the Son River which resembles a headless elephant which lost its life to Lorik´s sword. In Ballia District, north of Varanasi, Kesari records a "Lorik Dih"--here probably a low hill or mound--where Lorik also fought and grazed his cattle. A small distance from there is the location of the temple of Baramhain Devi, said to be Lorik´s _iṣṭ_, the deity behind his many victories. And reportedly outside of the birthplace of the Buddha in contemporary Nepal are two peaks called "Lorik´s Towers" (_lorik ke kanjūre_) where Gautama Buddha´s anxious father engaged Lorik to jump from peak to peak in order to amuse and occupy the mind of the young prince, which would otherwise turn with aversion from the world![14] These delightful stories underscore the belief in Lorik as an historical figure and the status of the Loriki as regional Ahir history.

The tradition of Loriki singing is now in decline. This writer spoke with many Ahirs who know of the epic and regard it with great respect, yet cannot recount the story in detail or produce a singer who is still able to perform. Most middle class, educated, urban Ahirs disavow any connection with Loriki singing along other rustic Ahir traditions, including wrestling and _biraha_.[15] These Ahir elites, many of whom support the

Yadava movement, are anxious to distance themselves from the more archaic expressions of caste heroism in favor of Brahmanical symbols (the sacred thread) and genealogical ´histories´ proving descent from the Yadu dynasty of Krishna. Pandey adds this about the decline of the Loriki tradition:[16]

> The growth of literacy is also responsible for the fact that new singers are not being produced. People are taking to modern forms of entertainment such as the radio and cinema. At the time of weddings educated Ahirs no longer want to invite traditional singers. ... In the next ten to fifteen years when the old singers pass away, it seems that this tradition may disappear entirely.

How does the Loriki help us to illuminate the history and practice of Ahir Bir worship? We know that this Hindi oral epic tradition is at least 600 years old, as it was the basis of the Sufi work Candayan written by Maulana Daud in 1379.[17] But there does not appear to be any reference within the work to the Ahir practice of establishing hero stones or shrines to their violently dead. Nor is it helpful to speculate about the epic originating from a regional cult of the hero Lorik like the Bir Babas of our study. Unlike many other regional epic traditions, the Loriki-Chanaini does not seem to derive from a specific cult center, but is localized in many dialects (Bhojpuri, Avadhi, Magahi,

Maithili, Chhattisgarhi, Kesari says Bangla) and cultural regions. Lorik is remembered as a human hero--albeit of mythic proportions--and is nowhere worshipped as a deity in the proper sense of the word.

What can be said about the Loriki is that it is at once an expression and legitimation of the Ahir self-perception as a race of fighters, wrestlers, warriors and heroes. Despite the decline in its performance, the Loriki remains for Ahirs historical proof of this ancestry and documentation of this heroic age. The heroic mettle of the Ahir is also expressed in contemporary times by the Yadava Movement, the involvement of Ahir men in the Indian wrestling tradition, and their general reputation as independent, proud, and combative. This heroic tradition gives us insight into why Ahir ghosts are felt to be particularly dangerous and powerful, and why the Ahir tend to make heroes of their untimely and violently dead.

The caste data supplied by Pandey may also hold significance for the study of the Bir tradition. Pandey notes that the three Ahir subcastes whose members sing the Loriki are the Dhandhor (or Danhor) and Gval (Gwal) in Eastern U.P., and the Krishnaut in Western Bihar.[18] These are the very Ahir subcastes known to be identified with Bir tradition in these areas.[19] Further research

is required before one might posit an association between Loriki singing and Bir worship (this might especially be looked for in the other areas where either tradition was known to occur), but this complimentarity would not be surprising.

Also interesting about the Loriki and its connection with Bir worship is the participation in both traditions of certain low castes. Important characters of low or untouchable caste are portrayed in a favorable light in the epic. The marriage party of Lorik´s brother consists of warriors belonging to various untouchable castes. Lorik learns wrestling from the Dhobi (Washerman) Ajayi, who is depicted as a valiant fighter. Bantha, the Chamar (Shoemaker) and Gangi the Nau (Barber) are portrayed as mighty heroes and friends of Lorik.[20] The Loriki might be seen not only as an epic which ´belongs´ to the Ahir, but to other castes as well, and Lorik might also be seen as their champion. Pandey lists Telis, Dhobis, Noniyas (builders of clay houses), Chamars, "and all other low caste people" as members of the epic audience.[21] Loriki singers include Mallah (Boatmen), Gaderiya or Gareriya (Shepherds) and Kurmi (mostly farmers). He says that "Kurmi and Gareriya are the other castes which get along well with Ahirs and enjoy listening to the Canaini epic" and that

these two castes even smoke hukkā with the Ahir.[22] This participation in the epic tradition by a particular assemblage of low castes is indicative of their general acceptance of the epic worldview and the position of the Ahir as brave fighters which is so essential to that vision. This is interesting with regard to the phenomenon of Bir worship because the castes listed by Pandey are many of the same which this writer found to participate in Bir worship, as devotees, temple caretakers, and even the caste identity of certain Birs. Those castes which live with the Ahir in villages, enthusiastically participate in Ahir oral traditions and--most likely--accept the Ahir in the heroic manner in which they view themselves, are also those which participate in Bir worship which is dominated by Ahir deities.

NOTES

3.2 AHIR HEROISM: THE YADAVA MOVEMENT & THE EPIC LORIKI

1 M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformations: A Study of Two Backward Classes Movements in India (Delhi: Macmillan, 1979), p. 132.

2 Rao, Social Movements, p. 134.

3 One of the most prolific redactors of Ahir history was Mannalal Abhimanyu, who wrote such pamphlets as Yādav Itihās (Yadav History), Gopa Jāti Kṣatriya Varṇa Mẽ Hai (The Cowherd Caste is in the Ksatriya varna), and Ahīr Vanśa Pradīp (The Splendor of the Ahir Dynasty), all published by Kali Prasad Yadav in Varanasi. He was also one of the editors for many years of the Yādaveś journal, another vehicle of the Yadava Movement.

4 M.S.A. Rao, "Caste and the Indian Army," The Economic Weekly 16 (August 29, 1964), 1439-1443.

5 For the various published versions and discussions of same, see: Shyam Manohar Pandey, The Hindi Oral Epic Loriki (Allahabad: Sahitya Bhawan, 1979)--a Bhojpuri version from Banaras, and The Hindi Oral Epic Canainī (Allahabad: Sahitya Bhawan, 1982)--an Avadhi version from Allahabad; Arjundas Kesari, Lorikāyan [in Hindi] (Mirzapur: Lokruchi Prakashan, 1980)--a Bhojpuri version from Mirzapur; Verrier Elwin, "The Ballad of Lorik and Candaini," Folk-songs of Chhattisgarh (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 338-370; George A. Grierson, "The Birth of Lorik," in Studies in Honor of Charles Rockwell Lanman (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Press, 1929), pp. 243-254: a partial Magahi version; Joyce B. Flueckiger, "Study of a Central Indian Folklore Region: Chhattisgarh," Diss. University of Wisconsin, Madison 1984, pp. 258-309--a discussion of the Chhattisgarh Candaini. In addition there are other articles and publications in Hindi on the epic tradition mentioned in Kesari Lorikāyan, p. 16, note 1. One "battle" chapter in verse has been published in bazaar pamphlet form--like those of the Alha Khand--by Mahadev Prasad Singh, titled Lorikāyan:

Hardīgarh kī Larāī (Varanasi: Thakur Prasad and Sons, n.d.).

[6] Flueckiger has argued persuasively that the Chhattisgarhi version of the Lorik-Canda epic--the Candaini--has been identified in recent history with the folklore region of Chhattisgarh rather than primarily with its Raut (the regional Ahir caste) originators. See Flueckiger, "Study," above.

[7] Pandey, *Loriki*, p. 16.

[8] Kesari, *Lorikāyan*, p. 25.

[9] Pandey, *Canainī*, p. 10.

[10] Grierson, "Birth."

[11] R.C. Pathak, ed., *Bhargava's Standard Illustrated Dictionary of the Hindi Language* (Varanasi: Bhargava Book Depot, 1971), p. 553. Rajendra Pandey, in his *Kasi Through the Ages* (Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1979), pp. 139ff, writes of the Sarnath *Dhamek Stupa* and the possible derivation of the term *dhamek* (after Cunningham) as *Dharmmopadesaka* or "Preacher of Dharma." [p. 142.]

[12] These versions of the localized Lorik legends were told to me by Hans Raj and Manna Raj Yadav, and Ram Sakal Yadav.

[13] Lorik's mighty leaps might be the most popular motif circulated in the oral tradition and reminds one quite obviously of Hanuman and his similar ability.

[14] Kesari, *Lorikāyan*, pp. 17-20; my translations.

[15] Pandey has made similar observations, *Canainī*, p. 24.

[16] Pandey, *Canainī*, p. 22.

[17] S.M. Pandey, "Some Problems in Studying Candayan," in *Early Hindi Devotional Literature in Current Research*, ed. W.M. Callewaert (Belgium: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1980).

[18] Pandey, *Canainī*, p. 23.

19 In the Banaras area, the Gwal Ahir were most consistently identified with the Bir phenomenon. Planalp indicates that the Bir Babas of Senapur (Jaunpur District) originated with the Dharhor Ahirs of the area ["Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village," Diss. Cornell University 1956, pp. 69, 159]. Archer reports the Bir Kuar tradition of Western Bihar to be associated with the Krishnaut subcaste [<u>The Vertical Man: A Study in Primitive Indian Sculpture</u> (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1947), p. 17].

20 Pandey, <u>Loriki</u>, p. 11.

21 Pandey, <u>Canainī</u>, pp. 10-11; <u>Loriki</u>, p. 20.

22 Pandey, <u>Canainī</u>, p. 17, note 4; p. 19, note 1.

3.3 Ahir Heroism: Songs of Ahir Birs

Having suggested the content and mood of the oral epic Loriki as an introduction to the phenomenon of Ahir heroism, we next turn to specific Bir traditions in order to further illustrate the same. We will first return to the cycle of the Bihar cattle deity Bir Kuar,[1] mentioned previously in the context of ritual in Part 3.1. We will then proceed to three _birahā_ songs about specific Birs from Varanasi, Mirzapur, and Gaya Districts of Uttar Pradesh. A discussion of the major themes contained in these songs will follow.

Archer found that the majority of the people he questioned knew only pieces of the Bir Kuar story, and sometimes only the deity´s name or caste identity. In certain areas Bir Kuar was simply reported to have died protecting his cattle from wild animals or cattle raiders, in some instances from members of an unspecified Muslim army. Yet other extended versions of the Bir Kuar tale were also available in the form of "_chanchars_, or long sagas which are sung by the Ahir at night."[2] The contents of these Archer divides into a "main" and two "branch" myths. The latter he summarizes as follows:[3]

> According to the first branch, Bir Kuar was an Ahir who goes into the jungle to graze his buffaloes and comes on his sister practicing witchcraft. With her are seven companions and all have taken off their clothes. He at first takes away the clothes but later he gives them back. Then the witches fearing scandal decide to get him killed. They send a tiger and Bir Kuar is fatally mauled. His pet buffalo carries him home and on his death bed he tells the Ahirs to worship him.
>
> In the second branch, Bir Kuar quarrels with his sister and in consequence she gives a curse that a tiger will kill him. Bir Kuar does not pay any heed and goes into the jungle. When he enters it, a tiger mauls him. His pet buffalo then brings him home and he tells the Ahirs to worship him.

What Archer calls the "main myth" combines these two elements in different variations, each version adding or embellishing details woven into this basic structure. These variations include the following information:[4]

- the designation of the land of Bir Kuar's birth (Ayodhya, Bhojpur), childhood (Brindaban) and marriage (local villages);

- reasons given for the quarrel with his sister (named variously, Radha Rukmini, Kani Biramdeia, Dewaki): over the gift of his pet buffalo to her at the time of his wedding, his disregard for her advice about the milking of cows or the danger of tigers in the jungle, her remonstrations over leaving his wife on his wedding night.

- Bir Kuar goes into the jungle on the night of his <u>gaunā</u>, before the consummation of his marriage.

- It is Bir Kuar's wife or mother (Kosila) who pleads with him to go into the jungle at night.

> - There is an emphasis on the devotion of pet buffalos (Parewa/Parai/Paraiya, Bhuwari or Banda and Barowa) for the hero, including attempts to protect and defend him from the tiger, and demonstrations of the fondness--bordering on obsession--of the hero for his herd or favorite buffalo/s to the extent of his neglect of human relationships. This, in some cases, becomes the cause of his death.
>
> - Bir Kuar is killed in many versions by a tigress or a blind tigress; because he has killed her mate, because she is sent by his sister or one of the other witches, or is herself a transformed witch.
>
> - In some versions Bir Kuar shows great strength and bravery; in others he is a normal if not foolhardy man who is easily killed.
>
> - The hero requests the establishment of posts and promises protection of cattle on his death bed, by appearing to the Ahir in a vision or dream, or by possessing his brother.
>
> - Descriptions of the other actors that require a second post.

In Archer´s analysis of this composite story, he emphasizes three aspects of the figure of Bir Kuar: the "fertilizer god," the "model" Ahir, and the "lesson" to his castefellows.[5] Archer feels that Bir Kuar´s obsession with his buffalos amounts to a sexual passion, and views this aspect of the hero´s character as the basis of his role as a fertility deity.[6]

> Birnath becomes the god of the buffaloes because he is obsessed with them. He acquires the power to bring the she-buffaloes on heat because he has loved one of them.

This is an interesting observation, and one might say in support of this type of reasoning that the stories of many Birs further north--more likely to serve as village guardian deities--emphasize their protective qualities as human beings. But Archer may be taking this point too far, especially when he attempts to mitigate this somewhat unusual behavior of the hero (and other more mundane qualities as well) by insisting that Bir Kuar is already a deity--an <u>avatār</u>, in fact--before his death, making the hero's actions part of an inscrutable divine plan. This is, of course, what is given by some renderings of the tradition: the story of Bir Kuar is the <u>līlā</u> of an incarnation of Krishna. But Archer need not explain away these ambiguous elements, as Hindu mythology is full of ambivalent heroes (and deities) and Bir stories are commonly the reworked tales of the violent deaths of ordinary men. What I believe to be even more fundamental to Bir Kuar's function as a "fertilizer god"--and what Archer attempts to dismiss (p. 81)--is precisely the fact of his violent death, transforming him into a powerful ghost who may be coaxed into utilizing this power to remove the obstacles to animal (and human) fertility. It remains that all Bir Babas--whether or not they are said to have any special fixation on members of their herd--have a

similar providence over cattle health, safety and fertility.

Archer also views Bir Kuar as the ideal Ahir who tirelessly tends and defends his cattle, but who is ultimately destroyed (through the agency of the sister/tiger) by an overweening commitment to this role at the expense of human/social relationships. This is an interesting and plausible interpretation of the story's events, but the recurring theme of the gaunā has other implications as well. A gaunā is the ceremony in which a bride is brought from her natal village into the home of her husband, the actual beginning of a marriage. The primary responsibility that Bir Kuar neglects is his duty to his wife on their wedding night. The recurring theme of Bir Kuar's death on the night of his gaunā is not coincidental. We have encountered this motif before in the cycle of Gazi Miyan and in the figure of Dulha Deo, the North Indian "bridegroom deity," and it is very likely one of pan-Indian distribution. The tragedy of the hero's violent and premature death is heightened by its occurrence just before the wedding night. It is even possible that the Bir's name echoes this tragic fate: Kuar (Archer does not give us the Devanagari) = kuwār = kumār = unmarried or virgin boy.[7]

Archer also discusses the blending of the mythology

of Bir Kuar with that of Krishna in many of the songs. Brindaban is the forest in which the hero dies, his sister is called Radha Rukmini, and his mother Dewaki. The stealing of the naked witches´ clothes immediately recalls the scene with Krishna and the bathing Gopis. In another series of "poems" (one must assume that they are written works) presented by Archer, the fusion of the two personalities is almost complete. Archer puzzles:[8]

> It does not seem possible to say which of these two elements is prior--whether Bir Kuar was actually a caste ancestor who was later expanded into Krishna or whether he originated as a form of Krishna who was peculiarly relevant to Ahir needs. Either is equally possible.

This is indeed a complex problem. One is tempted to conclude that Birnath or Bir Kuar is a deified caste hero later identified with Krishna, a major deity worshipped by the Ahir. This type identification is most obvious in the poems translated by Archer, which utilize motifs from the Puranic mythology of Gopala Krishna. Yet in the oral <u>chanchars</u> of Bir Kuar (and in some versions of the Loriki-Canaini epic) we see a less conscious or systematic usage of proper names and motifs, and a distinctly local brand of Krishna mythology. These local versions of the Krishna legend might be archaic motifs still circulated in the oral

tradition of the type which were prior to the consolidation of Puranic mythology, local variations of Puranic mythology, or the product of some combination of the two processes. This type of "chicken-or-the-egg" question is difficult to resolve, but the complexity of the problem should be borne in mind. It is not surprising, however, that the stories of some Ahir heroes should be interwoven with Krishna mythology. Krishna has long been a major Ahir deity (although how long and in what form has still to be resolved) whose local worship may resemble aspects of the the Bir cult and be intermingled with the same.[9]

The chanchars recorded by Archer are part of the oral tradition issuing from the cult of the Ahir cattle deity Bir Kuar in Western Bihar. By contrast, the following three songs were composed by Ahir songwriters who were working with extant oral traditions about the various Birs. One composer reported that he was commissioned to write his songs, and proceeded to "research" the stories of the Birs in order to complete the works. Part of the motivation behind the commissioning of these songs may certainly have been ´political:´ birahā very often contains political or social messages and are sung in public arenas, and the Ahir still trade on their identity as leaders and

heroes. Yet another motivation is one of cultural preservation. One non-professional singer of birahā complained often that the Ahir were losing their collective knowledge of their history, and needed to capture significant individuals and events in song that these stories be circulated and preserved. This same singer is one of few younger men who can sing the older form of birahā--kharī birahā--and is equally anxious to perpetuate the singing of the Loriki epic. The following three songs, therefore, were composed using the orally-circulated stories of three Birs, and were commissioned by Ahirs eager to preserve and promote their heroic vision of their heritage. We might expect that these songs would embellish the heroic qualities of their heroes at the expense of more arbitrary and idiosyncratic actions and events. They are examples of one genre of folk song performed at the Annual Decoration ceremonies of Banaras area Bir Babas and other local deities. The Hindi/Bhojpuri transcriptions of these songs are found in Appendix 2.

Manohar Bir[10]

My Rama O Ram ...[11]

In the sky, the stars give their blessing.
Your praises are sung by the sun and the moon.
The powerful come and salute you.
The women of heaven adorn your body.
You, who can turn a mountain into a tiny seed
 and back again into a mountain.
In the temples, mosques and shrines, the priests
 and mullahs forever chant the praises of the
 gods.

Those who give love have shown us this:
 that love arises by itself.
Good and evil cannot be hidden--
 both, inevitably, will be expressed.
If good is done, then good is returned.
If evil is done, the fruit will be evil.
Through good and evil, everyone will be tested.
His entire life a prisoner,
 even the gardener joins his God.

The sun, laughing, spreads its light.
The sky, clearing, smiles to itself.
The sun, laughing, spreads its light.

How much can we praise
 the glorious deeds of the young farmer?
What a fine jewel his bravery
 to be sung throughout the land!
The poets and singers skillfully celebrate
 the deeds of the young farmer.
A man of Kurmi Dih,
 the pride of Gaya District.[12]

Through his magic he supports the earth and sky.
Through his magic the morning becomes night.
Through his magic flowers open beneath their
 leaves.
Through his magic the sun and the moon do rise.
He raises up the objects of his compassion.
He gives eyes to the blind man
 and ears to the deaf.

O listen listen brothers to this story of Gaya District!
It was said that the buffalo was like a typhoon in our land.
In the day it hid itself in the jungle bushes.
But in the night began to wander through the village.
The men who lay sleeping on their charpoys, pouncing, the buffalo would quickly take their lives.
In just one week it slaughtered thirteen men.
The enraged District Officer gave the order, "Shoot that buffalo!"

It was said that the buffalo was like a typhoon in our land.
There was a Yadav named Manohar who had lost his sight.
The month of Phalgun was drawing to a close.
The Yadav took his staff and went to check the crops.
There was an open space in the middle of the field.

[SPOKEN] It was the buffalo´s habit to hide in the jungle bushes during the day. At night it went into the village, and flipping over a man´s charpoy, it took his life. The Yadav went out to check the fields ...

He sat in the crotch of a tree, his two legs dangling.
From somewhere the buffalo came to tauntingly lick his feet.

The sun, laughing, spreads its light.
Feeling the cold touch, Manohar began to laugh.
The sun, laughing, spreads its light.

The buffalo kept licking the blind man´s feet.
Then, suddenly, it jabbed them with its horns.
The blind man ground his teeth in anger.
He said, "This joke has gone too far!
Once I get my hands on you
you will regret this joke!
I´ll beat the life out of you
once I come down, once I come down!"
Sometimes the buffalo licked him, sometimes it jabbed him with its horns.
The blind man showered insults in an utter rage,
"I will come quickly, I´ll waste no time.
I will make you blind like me
once I come down, once I come down!"

[SPOKEN] But the buffalo ignored his threats. Then Manohar said:

"Listen you bastard, come to your senses!
Why have you challenged this blind man?
I will come quickly, I´ll waste no time.
I´ll beat the life out of you
once I come down, once I come down!"

Blessed is this mighty age.
Blessed are the brave heroes of this land.
Ram and Hanuman walked upon this earth.
Karna and Dhananjay were wise heroes such as these.

The blind man could no longer bear the wounds from the jabbing horns.
He stretched his legs and leapt down from the tree,
landing in the middle of the buffalo´s neck.
The furious animal ran out into the field.
Grabbing stout sticks and staffs, the entire village came running,
forgetting the safety of their houses and their fields.
Morning slowly became afternoon.
The hours of dusk were drawing near.
The buffalo´s gait slowed, spittle dripping from its mouth.
Even then Manohar said, "I will not let go!"
Surrounding the field was a fence of barbed wire.
The buffalo got caught and tumbled to the ground.

[SPOKEN] The buffalo ran around and around the field. Morning passed, evening was drawing near. Running and running, the buffalo fell. The village people gathered and cried, "Manohar, let it go!" But Manohar respectfully bowed to them and said,

"Please allow me to treat the wounds on my feet. I will not let him go!
Let me finish my revenge. I will not let him go!
How many mothers and sisters had to wash the vermillion from their hair?"
The blind man said, "This one has met with a Yadav today.
Let me beat him on the chest with my bare arms. I will not let him go!"
The blood of the dying buffalo spilled onto the ground.
Rupee notes showered on the steadfast Manohar.
Let his name be printed in the magazines and newspapers!
"I will not let him go!"
As our teacher Pattu Gwal has told us,[13]
The District Officer then came into the field.

The blind man´s picture was taken with the buffalo.

The sun, laughing, spreads its light.
Manna Raj asks for the blessing of Shiv Murat.[14]
The sun, laughing, spreads its light.

My Rama, O Ram.

15
Bachau Bir

My Rama O Ram ...

It happened right in Sir Karhiya, next to Hindu
University
where Malviji had some land.[16]
this tale of mighty Bachau Bir, friends.
Listen to this story beyond compare, friends!

They say that Malviji had some land
where Kshatri Ambe Singh also had a claim.
Ambe Singh went there and took his stand.
Refusing to back off, Malviji stood his ground.

Malviji regarded Bachau as his younger brother.
He said, "Have the deed written in your name."
The surveyor would come to measure the land, friends.
Listen to this story beyond compare, friends.

There was an old feud between Bachau and Riddhi-Siddhi.
The Thakurs wanted to kill him by deception.
Leaving his axe at home, Bachau went out empty-handed.
His wife pleaded, "Take it! You are dealing with
enemies!"
Bachau said, "Today I will go without a weapon."
"I too will take my place among gentlemen."

But the Thakur gang was powerful, friends.
Listen to this story beyond compare, friends.

[SPOKEN] Bachau Bir´s wife said to her husband, "Take your axe with you." He answered, "Very important people will come, so I will go empty-handed when the field is measured." But the Thakur gang was powerful, friends. People had already gathered ...

The clouds spread across the sky.
The manly, tiger-like Bachau left his house.
The clouds spread across the sky.

The mighty Riddhi-Siddhi had an old feud with Bachau.
At every step Bachau thought, "The Thakur gang is powerful."
Going to the surveying of the field, his eyes grew red with rage.
Before him were eighteen men, their lances and spears sharpened.
Eighteen young Thakur men, brave and alert as tigers.
The tape was taken up. The measuring began. Young Bachau stood alone.

The clouds spread across the sky.
They began to taunt him in front of the official.
The clouds spread across the sky.

Babua Singh spoke sharply, "Don´t miss this chance, men!"
"Block Bachau´s way. Don´t let him escape."
In this spirit Gudari Mama spoke.
The day was Monday. "Don´t miss this chance, men!"

The official realized that there would be a fight.
He went up to Bachau and said,
"You are in great danger."
("Don´t miss this chance men!")
"Get in my carriage and come away with me."
But Bachau said loudly, "Today I will see how tough the Thakurs are."

The clouds spread across the sky.
"I will break their skulls and beat them with my fists."
The clouds spread across the sky.

Taking up their weapons, the Thakur gang moved in.
Shouting a war cry, the men came out into the field.
Their staffs, knives and spears were flashing.
They challenged Bachau by twisting their moustaches.
"Today. In this field."
Giving this challenge, the Thakur gang moved in.
Steadily Bachau said, "Don´t be so proud."
"I killed your father. You too may lose your life."
"Riddhi-Siddhi, don´t be so proud. Your whole family may be destroyed."
"If my staff is to rain down blows, sparks will fly."
The Thakur gang moved in.

In the face of the assembled gang, Bachau Bir did not
run.
Bachau asked the Thakurs for half an hour´s time.

The clouds spread across the sky.
"Or allow me to have a staff," he asked the crowd in the
field.
The clouds spread across the sky.

[SPOKEN] From the time that they surrounded him, Bachau asked, "Please give me a staff." But they completely closed him in.

Babua´s Thakur men did not hesitate.
Running toward him, every man leaped upon Bachau.
Staffs began to fly with a swishing sound.
Jhimmal Yadav broke away and began to run.
Grabbing his staff, it seemed like Bachau set it on
fire.
He chased them five <u>bīghās</u>,[17] beating them back.
He started to move in the direction of his house.
Ahead was a wire fence that surrounded the university.
Catching his foot, the man like a tiger fell.

[SPOKEN] Alone, fighting eighteen young men, he chased them five <u>bīghās</u>. He thought, "Now I can escape and run toward my house." Ahead was the university, and surrounding it was a barbed-wire fence. He caught his foot and fell.

Young Bachau fell like a fallen tree.
Sticks and knives again fell upon him.
As sticks and knives again fell upon him,
Out in front came Gudariya Mama.
He said, "If you leave this man alive,"
"If he lives, he will find us and kill us."
"If he lives, he will find us and kill us."
So he beat him with two staffs.

[SPOKEN] Gudari Mama, who was Bachau´s own uncle, said, "If we let Bachau go and he lives, then the lives of eighteen men will not be spared. Finish him today.
Gudari Mama beat him with two staffs.

When Bachau´s body was carried to Bhelupur Police
Station,
in the middle of the journey, Bachau attained the
Heaven of Heroes.

The clouds spread across the sky.
The corpse was quickly taken for an autopsy.
The clouds spread across the sky.

Every Ahir went with the body, O didn´t they?
Bachau Bir´s heart weighed fourteen pounds.[18]
He could drink the milk of one buffalo, and eat three pounds of food.
Listen, listen,
Tears started to flow and fall from many eyes, O didn´t they?
One great fighter had left the Yadav family.
Yadav Guru Bihari was the first to praise the hero in song.
Pattu´s songs are also famous, aren´t they?
Hearing the news of Bachau´s death, all of Banaras-Kashi was sad.
The Judge gave the ruling, "Hang Riddhi-Siddhi!"

The clouds spread across the sky.
Yadav Ram Sakal speaks this with flowing eyes.
The clouds spread across the sky.

My Rama O Ram

19
Bechu Bir

The world is dyed in the colorful stories of its heroes,
worshipped as the true gods of the Kali Age.
A tale from Mirzapur District comes to mind,
where the Yadav people displayed their shining glory.
This is an old story that all will enjoy.
It will thrill every nerve of the honored audience.

Papihata Village was right on the bank of the Jhalahiya River.
In that village lived a famous warrior, Bachan Yadav was his name.

They say, "O God, how rich your fortune!"
I wish I could keep your image in my heart forever.[20]

Dark black hair filled with beautiful curls.
His forehead shone like the moon, and his eyes were like diamonds and pearls.
The young man carried a heavy fighting staff.
He grazed his cows in the jungle.
This was his daily routine, and he never was afraid.
Though a man, he would wrestle with a lion.
Each day he would milk his cows in the jungle.
He would drink the milk himself and feed some to the lion.

In what mother´s womb has the Creator made your body!
I wish I could keep your image in my heart forever.

[SPOKEN] It was Bachan Yadav´s job to graze his cows each day in the jungle and wrestle with a lion. One day, after fighting with the lion, Bachan Yadav went to see his wife who had just arrived from her village. Seeing his scratches, she asked about them. He said, "I fight with a lion." She said, "Go. Defeat that lion. Then I will spend our wedding night with you." Bachan Yadav listened to this and left the house. And again his wife was saying,

"My dear husband, don´t be humiliated by the lion.
My dear husband will of course feed the lion milk.
But on the day you defeat the lion your prestige will increase.
On that day we will spend our wedding night.
That will be a glorious day in the jungle, my dear husband.
My dear husband will of course feed the lion milk."

[SPOKEN] Then Bachan Yadav left his house ...

At that moment the pen of the Creator was shaken.
Overbearing became the Ahir´s pride.
Like what happened to Babu Lorik in another age.[21]
He would grazed his cows in the middle of Pipari.
The ruler of Neurapur did a terrible thing.
He took the lives of many virtuous people.
Many heroes have lived upon this earth.
But time has defeated them all.

In the same way time caught up with Bachan Yadav.
The youth went off to fight the lion.
On a path in the middle of the Jhalahiya River

Shouting a challenge to the bear, the young man began to fight.
But the bear took Bachan´s life.
The mournful news of his death began to spread.
Making a vow, his sweetheart set out from her house.

[SPOKEN] When Bachan Yadav left the house, he met with a bear on the path. When he challenged the bear and began to fight, the bear threw him down and tore him open. When his wife heard the news, she swore as she was leaving the house that, "Until the bear dies I will not eat or drink even water."

She swore to her husband´s revenge.
The women forbade herself food, sleep and water.
She swore to her husband´s revenge.

Powerful in strength, she left the house in a rage.
Stopping her, the village people pleaded, "Daughter, aren´t you afraid?"
Taking a sword in her hand, she looked like the goddess Kali.
She arrived at the place where the lion was deep in sorrow.

[SPOKEN] Bachan Yadav´s wife killed the bear and went to her husband. There the lion was thinking that, "Today my friend did not come to fight with me." Finding Bachan´s body on the path, the lion was crying. How was he crying?

The poor lion friend was crying over Bachan´s body.
"Now who will fight with me and feed me milk?
In this world, who will I have as a friend?"
The poor lion friend was gazing mournfully at the body when Bachan´s wife arrived.
She took her husband on her lap and embraced him.
An air of sorrowful compassion spread throughout the forest. The poor lion friend was crying.

[SPOKEN] Bachan Yadav´s wife came and held her husband. On the bank of the Jhalahiya River she built a funeral pyre and cremated herself with his body.

In the middle of the jungle
The heavenly stars came down to give their blessing
in the middle of the jungle.

"You have avenged my friend; your story will live forever."
At this sight, even the stones were moved
in the middle of the jungle.
In the middle of the jungle, Rama, in the middle of the jungle,
even the stones were moved in the middle of the jungle.

Burning himself, the lion too became ashes.
Three memorials were built.
Bachan´s name was changed to Bechu Bir
known thus by all the world.
In the middle of the jungle.

[SPOKEN] Yes, when the lion also burned himself,
Bachan´s name was changed to Bechu and the lion´s name
to Bir. People now worship in the name of Bechu Bir.

On the day of Kartik Ekadashi there is a huge religious fair.
People come to rid themselves of ghosts, and to receive children.
They beat their skulls on the platform of the shrine.
In the middle of the jungle.

As our teacher Pattu Gwal has told us, the story ends here.
Sarayu Gwal says that everyone in U.P. knows the name of Bechu Bir.

She swore to her husband´s revenge.

The writing of Shiv Murat and Manna Raj is filled with virtue.

She swore to her husband´s revenge.

My Rama O Ram

With the exception of "Manohar Bir," the songs translated above are essentially death songs: they describe the circumstances surrounding the violent and tragic deaths of their subjects. They are posterior to the development of a cult, so we are given certain details of the transformation of slain hero into local deity: Bir Kuar appeared to family members and promised blessings and protection in exchange for the establishment and worship of his image (post); memorials (samādhis) were build on the ashes of Bechu Bir, his wife (a Sati) and tiger friend, now the focus of a large Mela on Kartik Ekadashi. Bachau´s song leaves him in the "Heaven of Heroes" (bīr gati), but stories told by people living near the site of his death reveal his return as a discontented spirit and the building and worship of his shrine.[22]

Characteristic of the stories of the deified dead, the nature of death portrayed in these songs is violent, tragic and premature, and often unjust. In the main body of his legend, Bir Kuar was overwhelmed by the fatal pairing of wild animal and witchcraft, Bachau was outnumbered and brutally slain by Thakur enemies, and Bechu by the surprise attack of a ferocious bear. The tragedy of the heroes´ deaths is heightened by certain details. They were all young men in their prime. Kuar

and Bechu were slain at the time of the gaunā ceremony just before the wedding night. All displayed a pride that led to their immediate undoing: Kuar ignored the warnings of his sister, Bachau recklessly confronted his enemies without a weapon despite the protests of his wife, and the swelling of Bechu's pride is compared to that of the hero Lorik's who also met a tragic end.

The motif of death by wild animal attack is also typical of these tales. Bir Kuar is killed by a tigress/witch, and oral reports of Bechu's death make the tiger--and not the bear--the death agent. Death by tiger attack is a common folklore motif found throughout rural and tribal India, the type of ghost/deity to result (often worshipped for protection from tigers) is called Baghaut (Hindi bāgh = tiger) in many areas of the North. The stories of Bir Kuar, Bechu Bir (and Govind Rawal Bengal: Part 3.1) all share this motif. Encounters with wild animals in these stories have other meanings as well. Manohar, blind and alone, saved his village from the killer buffalo that managed to elude the well-armed authorities. This echoes the pre-death stories of the other figures, all of whom had victorious encounters with wild animals and appeared to almost relished the challenge. Bachau is famous in the oral tradition for saving his village headman from a wild

jungle tiger (see Part 2.5), Bechu playfully wrestles with a tiger, and even the hero Lorik fights with tigers, bears and other wild animals to reach his beloved Chanaini.[23] While it is true that buffalos gone mad and the wild animals of the jungle pose a threat to human life, they also symbolize the physical and supernatural dangers of the jungle areas outside of the village settlement. The association of tigers and tiger-spirits with witchcraft and sorcery is common in these stories. The wild buffalo, normally placid, is an eruption from within of the chaotic, ominous and threatening.[24] The hero is the rare individual who will face the beast and rescue others from danger. The heroes of our stories demonstrate their extraordinary strength, valor, and supernatural powers (siddhis) through their victorious encounters with these deadly animals. Yet even these powers prove unequal to human flaws and the tragic twists of fate. Thus there are two roles that wild animals play in these stories: the death agents of central figures and the adversaries that prove their heroic mettle.

Other details in the songs are also evidence of the heroic nature of their subjects: the size of Bachau´s "heart/liver" and the amount he could eat, his final attainment of the Hero´s Heaven. Bechu, like Lorik, is

a wrestler (pahalwān), a characterization which not only implies great strength and bravery but control and spiritual attainment. The martial theme of revenge is strong. Manohar takes his revenge on the buffalo; Bachau's enemies fear his revenge and cannot consider leaving him alive; Bechu's wife becomes like the ferocious goddess Kali and takes her revenge upon the bear that slays her husband.

The revenge of Bechu's wife and the role of women in the songs also requires comment. Other versions of the Bechu Bir story make his wife a Sati--but not necessarily the avenger of her husband--as well the tiger's second victim who leaves the side of her infant during the period of ritual impurity after its birth, another tragic element. But this does not detract from the power of the song which features a female heroine worthy of many South Indian traditions. Bechu's wife first challenges him to defeat the tiger with whom he wrestles in sport, at which time she promises to join him on their wedding night. She then proceeds to avenge his death like an angry goddess. Further, the enraged wife--who has vowed to ingest nothing until the killer himself is slain--has no trouble with the bear that so easily dispatched her husband. Women are otherwise prominent in these songs and their related traditions.

They are helpless as well as independent and resourceful; nurturing and protective as well as treacherous and goading; chaste and obedient as well as willful, aggressive and seductive. The complexity and deep ambivalence of female figures in the Ahir epics, stories, and songs resonates with other images of the female in South Asian traditions, but the thorough treatment of this fascinating topic is the proper subject of another work and cannot be handled adequately here.

The _chanchars_ of Bir Kuar and the _birahā_ songs of Manohar, Bachau and Bechu Birs add to our understanding of why Ahir figures are often the focus of cultic attention. An individual of any caste--through the circumstances of his/her death and subsequent deification--might become the object of worship, but it appears that certain groups possess more articulated traditions of ancestor and hero worship. The epic Loriki and the songs of Ahir Birs are at once evidence and expressions of such a tradition carried by certain sub-castes of North Indian Ahirs. These traditions reveal a more archaic and rustic brand of heroism than is found in the great pan-Indian epics; they are closely identified with the Ahir caste and their admirers or specific localities. The songs, especially, are

associated with violent death and the bhūt-pret complex and are unevenly reworked with ´heroic´ elements. For this reason the educated elites who are the core of the Yadava Movement wish to disassociate themselves from these traditions in favor of more orthodox forms of legitimation. It is interesting, also, that the folk traditions of the Ahir show a kinship with the mythology of Krishna Gopala, while the Yadava Movement prefers to associate itself with the martial Krishna of the Mahabharata. This creates logical problems with the mythological and historical data: if Krishna was a foster son of Nanda Baba, then how could the cowherds descend from the Yadava line? Or if one is to accept that all contemporary Ahirs are descended from the Abhiras (who theoretically were the originators of the Krishna Gopala cult), how could they be Yadavas, a race which history records as their enemies in some instances? These were not problems for the Ahirs interviewed for this study, however, who quite uncritically accept the Loriki, Bir worship and Yadava Movement philosophy together as proof of the Ahirs´ claim of martial ancestry. There are in addition other stories circulated in oral form which seek to explain the apparent loss in status of the contemporary Ahir. We will close with an example.[25]

All Birs are not Ahirs. Birs are mainly Kshatriyas or Rajput, the mighty ones (<u>bahādur log</u>). Ahir and Kshatri are the same. According to the old traditional stories, Raghuvansi and Jaduvansi were both brother kings. Jaduvansi Raja lived in the jungle. Raghuvansi--the educated, intelligent brother--did the ruling. He was raised to rule. When he was dying he told his younger brother to leave the jungle and take up the kingship. The younger brother responded that, "I keep four cows, drink milk, eat fruit, and live in the jungle. The peace and happiness found in the jungle is not to be had by ruling with all its responsibilities." So he stayed in the jungle, and people started to call these people Gwal or Ahir. But they are actually Kshatriya. Since that time Kshatri and Gwal people have been considered as separate.

NOTES

3.3 AHIR HEROISM: SONGS OF AHIR BIRS

1 W.G. Archer, The Vertical Man: A Study in Primitive Indian Sculpture (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1947).

2 Archer, Vertical, p. 49. Unfortunately we are not told more about this folk song genre.

3 Archer, Vertical, p. 52.

4 Archer, Vertical, pp. 49-79.

5 Archer, Vertical, pp. 79-81.

6 Archer, Vertical, p. 80.

7 Hargovind and Bholanath Tiwari, eds., Tulsī Śabdsāgar (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1954), p. 90.

8 Archer, Vertical, pp. 103-104.

9 The Sohrai festival--in other areas a festival of Krishna--is a celebration of Bir Kuar in Western Bihar [Archer, Vertical, p. 26]. In addition, some Banaras Birs are worshipped on the day of Govardhan Puja. Vaudeville notes the folk worship of Krishna on today's Mount Govardhan in the form of a cone-shaped stone: "In the village temple Kṛṣṇa-Govardhan (Girirāj) is worshipped in the form of a cone-shaped blackish stone dressed in yellow robes and adorned with a garland of wild flowers (vanamālā) appropriate to Krsna-Gopala." [Charlotte Vaudeville, "The Cowherd God in Ancient India," in Pastoralists and Nomads in South Asia, ed. L.S. Leshnik and G.D. Sontheimer (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975), p. 99.]

The Abhira origin of the Krishna-Gopi myth has been assumed for decades [Bhandarkar, Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1965), pp. 35-38, and Vaudeville, "Cowherd," p. 104]. More recently, it appears that Vaudeville is backing away from such a direct statement of this

problem ["The Govardhan Myth in North India," Indo-Iranian Journal, 22 (1980), 1-45.]. Friedhelm Hardy also finds little proof of the Abhira origin of Gopala Krishna [Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), note 20, p. 58.]. The descent of all contemporary Ahirs from the historical Abhiras is also doubted [Part 3.4 above].

10 "Manohar Bir" as sung by Hans Raj Yadav was recorded in Banaras in 1981. I would like to thank Hank Heifetz, Dr. Ashok Kalrah, Dr. Sudha Kalrah and O.P. Sharma for their help with the translation and transcription of this song.

11 This line is a slow, caressing invocation of the god Rama, found at the beginning and end of each birahā song. The more philosophical or theological portions of the song are indented in order to set them apart from the--by comparison--rapidly-presented story line. This first section appears to be adapted from a Muslim devotional song: the prominence of Urdu words and references to Islam betray this cultural borrowing.

12 The story line is broken here to sing this verse in raise of Bhagwan.

13 Pattu Gwal was the foremost celā (student) of the famous Bihari Lal, the reputed originator of modern birahā. Pattu is cited here as the singer´s guru figure, almost a genealogical footnote.

14 This is the author´s and singer´s signature line. The song was written by Shiv Murat, but sung in this instance by Hans Raj Yadav under the guidance of his teacher and older brother Manna Raj, whose name is given in the line.

15 "Bachau Bir" as sung by Hans Raj Yadav was recorded in Banaras in 1981. The song was written by Ram Sakal Yadav, the son of Pattu Yadav. I would like to thank Hank Heifetz, Dr. Ashok Kalrah and O.P. Sharma for their help with the translation and transcription of this song.

16 Pandit Madan Malaviya (1861-1946) was the founder of Banaras Hindu University. In order to construct the large B.H.U. campus, it was necessary to buy the land of many villages and relocate the

inhabitants. Some of the people living in these villages became employees of the University, and others were resettled outside the walls. A certain amount of conflict accompanied this process, some of which is conveyed by this song.

17 A bīghā is a measurement of land equal to 5/8ths of an acre. M. Chaturvedi and B. Tiwari, eds., A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary, 6th ed. (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1980), p. 525.

18 A kalejā, translated as both "liver" and "heart," is understood as the organ in the body which is the seat of knowledge and power. If one eats the kalejā of an individual (as ´witches´ and others are purported to do), one may obtain these powers from them. John D. Smith also writes of a postmortem examination of a bandit-hero, revealing a huge heart which terrified the examining doctor. See Smith, "The Two Sanskrit Epics," in Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry, ed. A.T. Hatto (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1980), p. 54.

19 "Bechu Bir" as sung by Hans Raj Yadav was recorded in Banaras in 1981. I would like to thank Virendra Singh, Ram Chandra Pandit and O.P. Sharma for their help with the translation and transcription of this song.

20 These lines were adapted from a Hindi film song (personal communication with Virendra Singh), not an unusual procedure in the composition of contemporary biraha, which is characterized by a mixture of styles, tunes, and meters.

21 This is a reference to Lorik, the Ahir hero of the Loriki. Lorik also suffered from an excess of pride which caused him serious setbacks and ultimately his honor and life. Pipari is the name of a kingdom mentioned many times in the epic, the territory of enemy tribes where the Ahir were forbidden to graze their cows [see S.M. Pandey, The Hindi Oral Epic Canainī (Allahabad: Sahitya Bhawan, 1982, p. 49ff]. Neurapur is another kingdom with which Lorik fought many battles [see Pandey, The Hindi Oral Epic Loriki (Allahabad: Sahitya Bhawan, 1979), p. 461ff for the Hindi summary of the "Battle of Neurapur"]. My translation of these last two lines may not be accurate, because it is not clear which incident is being referred to.

22 The other stories about Bachau are given in Part 2.5 above.

23 Verrier Elwin, "The Ballad of Lorik and Candaini," Folk-songs of Chhattisgarh (Madras: Oxford, 1946), p. 351. Pandey, Loriki, p. 14. Lorik´s submission of a wild and dangerous horse is described in Elwin, Ballad, p. 368, and Pandey, Loriki, p. 24.

24 I remember a Hindi film that I saw in 1981 (an imitation of sorts of the Exorcist) in which the spectre of a mad buffalo running amok in the streets was understood as an omen that something terrible would happen to an impending marriage.

25 Personal interview with Lal Baba at the site of Chhatariya Bir, Varanasi, December 10, 1981.

3.4 Conclusion: The Ahir Bir Tradition

We have seen that the Gwal and Danhor subcastes of the Ahir in eastern Uttar Pradesh and the Krishnaut of western Bihar are associated with the worship of Birs in these areas. There is evidence that the Ahir Bir cult also extends into West Bengal, contiguous with the above region and sharing many of its folk religious traditions. In addition to the three-state area highlighted by this study, it is almost certain that some form or trace of the cult may be found in adjoining districts where the Ahir make up a significant part of the population, or in other regions of India where certain castes or subcastes of cow and buffalo herders make their home. In many cases the Ahir origin of these cults is obscured, and can be reconstructed through a pattern of identifications as illustrated by this study. Even in areas where the Ahir no longer predominate, they have left their trace in the identity of these shrines.

We have demonstrated that the Ahir possess a heroic tradition in which they perceive themselves as a martial race. If one subscribes to the theory that all of the contemporary caste groups called Ahir are descended from the historical Abhiras, then the martial ancestry of the

Ahir has additional documentation. Not all scholars agree with the sweeping generalizations to this effect made by B.S. Suryavanshi and others.[1] A new generation of literature argues with aspects of this hypothesis with carefully documented studies. David Sopher writes:[2]

> The distribution of pastóral castes does not appear to call for an origin from supposed immigrant waves of nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists coming from the drier lands to the west as was suggested in some of the earlier literature on caste. The prominence and wide distribution of the North Indian pastoral caste-clusters would hardly be possible under this hypothesis, which would lead rather to the expectation of a very marked eastward and southward decay in their strength. Nor need one postulate a transformation of the traditional pastoral castes from nomads to sedentary folk; according to the model proposed here, they would always have been fairly sedentary. Yet their moderate mobility and the wider radius of their operations and contacts as compared to that of most village folk may account for the linking together of pastoral jātis in unusually large jāti-clusters.

To this Sontheimer adds:[3]

> The Gollas are not a homogeneous race, but are composed of a large number of endogamous groups, the members of which are found to differ from one another in their features and complexion and even in their manners and usages. Their traditions tend to ... show how people of different origin have been linked together by common occupations and constitute the Golla caste.

The historical assimilation of aboriginal and other herding groups into the Ahir fold has been documented in

many places. This type of inclusiveness, often based upon shared occupation, is never more evident than with the modern Yadava Movement. Groups that have the barest connection with the cow, bull or buffalo are now being encouraged into an even greater "Yadava" organization that extends to all areas of the subcontinent. I tend to see Suryavanshi´s Abhira hypothesis as being unduly influenced by Yadava Movement politics and rhetoric. If there is a connection between the Abhiras and any castes or subcastes called Ahir, then this must be substantiated by more than the circumstantial evidence now offered.

The Yadava Movement is, however, an authentic expression of the Ahir heroic tradition--not because of its claim of Ahir descent from the ancient Yadavas, but because of its rapid acceptance among those already convinced of their martial ancestry. M.S.A. Rao writes about Ahirs ("Yadavas") in leadership roles in the Backward Classes and Scheduled Castes associations[4]

> ... the Yadavas are considered to be the leaders, and the Yadava ideology provides a rationale for such leadership. The top Yadava political elite argues that the Yadavas in Dwapara Yug fought an epic war against injustice and inequality under the leadership of Lord Krishna. In the present phase of the cosmic cycle of time, Kaliyug, it is their supreme responsibility, as the descendants of the Yadu dynasty, to fight once again the injustice and exploitation of the backward

> classes ... because the Yadavas form the largest single caste among Other Backward Classes.

This traditional role of leadership expressed here on the national level through the rhetoric of the Yadava Movement has its analogue in more local and rural milieus. The epic Loriki is the major backdrop against which the heroic stature of rustic Ahir must be viewed. The chanchars of Bir Kuar and the birahā songs of Manohar, Bachau and Bechu Birs are also examples of this local brand of heroism. The Ahir are seen by allied castes as natural leaders because of their independence, bravery and physical strength. Ahir men are conspicuous among the castes participating in wrestling and body building (almost all of the Ahir Birs are said to be "wrestlers" pahalwān). As one might expect, this claim to martial status might bring the Ahir into conflict with local ´Kshatriyas,´ and this tension is documented in ethnography and folklore.[5] This aspect of the Ahir ´character´ is also negatively described by those fearful of their growing political and economic power. The Ahir are also the objects of the type of humor levelled at the North Indian Sikhs, another group famous for its martial tradition.[6]

The Ahir also practice the custom of establishing shrines to honor and pacify their "untimely" dead.

However the manner of death, the occupying souls tend to be viewed as "heroes," and the shrines as potential sources of substantial power. The ritual establishment of shrines to "quiet" the untimely dead is performed by members of most other castes groups in the Varanasi area, but Ahir deities as a class are believed to be particularly "awake" and are found in greater numbers. The number of Ahir Bir shrines may be attributed in part to the large percentage of Ahir in the region, but their status among local deities is indisputable, and is inseparable from the stature of the Ahir under discussion.

The work of Günther-Dietz Sontheimer has substantiated the connection between pastoralism and hero worship. Sontheimer´s writings reveal that both the Gavli (Cowherds) and Dhangar (Shepherds) of Maharashtra worship ancestors and heroes called _bīr_/_vīr_, and he goes so far as to state that, "the shared traditions of worshipping _bīr_s are ubiquitous amongst pastoral castes from Nepal to Tamilnadu."[7] In his _Birobā, Mhaskobā und Khaṇḍobā_, Sontheimer identifies the origins of the well-known Maharashtrian deities named in the title with herding groups (the Kuruvas, Gavli and Dhangar), and describes the process whereby these pastoral gods were assimilated into the pantheons of the settled agricul-

tural population, eventually becoming the gods of all castes.[8] Although the development of these deities has been complex, it is not difficult to perceive a deified hero, ancestor or tribal chief at the root of many versions of these cults. Deleury, in a postscript to his work on the Maharashtrian god Vithoba, is finally convinced that this deity originated as "a hero who fought some cattle thieves and died in the struggle," and the image of Vithoba as "a later development of a primitive hero stone."[9] Sontheimer substantiates this conclusion, and identifies the Gavli at the origin of the Pandharpur cult.[10]

Other middle-to-low ranking castes and ´tribal´ or semi-tribal groups participate enthusiastically in the Bir cult as worshippers, caretakers, and temple priests. This writer´s data and other sources reveal Gaderiya, Gosai, Kunbi, Kurmi, Bhar, Raj Bhar, Kol, Gond, Kumhar, Dhobi, Teli, Khatik, Mallah, Manjhi, Dom, Chamar, and other groups classed as "Harijan" (Raidas, etc.) to be active in the tradition.[11] At least one Brahman acting as a Bir Baba temple caretaker was encountered, and a similarly small percentage of members of other upper castes were involved with individual temples. In many cases these castes accept the deities as Ahir dead, in others the "heroes" are said to originate from the

castes of other devotees. The Ahir Bir tradition has never existed in a vacuum of similar or related cults. The worship the deified dead has long been a major component of South Asian folk religion, and many other castes and ethnic groups possess articulated traditions of hero worship as part of their cultural heritage. In addition to pastoralists, the worship of the ancestors, leaders, and the violently dead plays a major role in the religion of aboriginal groups. The hero worship of the Bhars has already been mentioned in this work (Part 2.5, especially note 4). The Bhuiyas/Bhuinyas of southern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, celebrate their tribal ancestor/heroes--also called Birs--with an oral epic tradition. The epic of Tulsi Bir is mentioned by Crooke and others in the late 19th Century, and has been documented more recently among the Bhuinyas of Gaya District by Gyan Prakash. Prakash has recorded some oral performances of the Bhuinya epic, and says that "each village has a little clay shrine for Tulsi Bir."[12] These two examples demonstrate that the ancestor and hero worship of the Ahir is not a phenomenon unique to this group, but is shared in some form by other ethnic groups, some also using the term <u>bīr</u> to describe their heroes. One might speculate that this usage was adopted at some point in history from the Rajput clans that

moved into the various regions, replacing these groups as the dominant castes, or from familiarity with such as the Rajput epic Alha Khand.[13] While hero worship did not originate with the greater Rajput tradition, the heroic expressions of some of the lower castes and tribes show a self-consciousness vis-a-vis this tradition. The Ahir bīr-asthān seems to fall somewhere between the bhūt-asthān of the untimely dead and what we might call the 'classical' hero stone; in one way it appears to be the former attempting to look more like the latter. The other castes that participate actively in Bir worship in the Banaras area do so in acceptance and perhaps imitation of the heroic stature of the Ahir, and in other cases (as with the Bhuiyas and Bhars) in continuity with a distinct heroic tradition.

One final note to correct the impression--no doubt conveyed by this section--that the Ahir are only or primarily concerned with the worship of caste heroes. The Ahir clearly establish shrines to their "untimely" dead, and worship them when necessary as family, caste, field, cattle, village deities. But as often these Bir shrines move out of Ahir control and patronage, and become the gods of all (especially lower) castes. The Ahir do not seem to be possessive of these shrines, and they do not necessarily become the foci of elaborate and

organized cultic activity which reifies caste or clan identity, or represent a system of ancestor worship. The cult of Bir Kuar reported upon by Archer in the 1930's is the nearest example that we have of this kind of religious activity, better documented for South India,[14] yet Bir Kuar functions mainly as a cattle fertility deity. The Ahir establish these shrines when necessary, as is their custom, and foster a hero's reputation as they may. But it is enough that these Ahir Birs are quiet or occasionally helpful presences, or reminders of the Ahir's heroic stature to the outside world. Bir Babas are not the major deities of the Ahir,[15] and control over the most popular shrines has almost always passed out of the hands of this caste.

NOTES

3.4 THE AHIR BIR TRADITION: CONCLUSIONS

1

R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1965); B.S. Suryavanshi, *The Abhiras: Their History and Culture* (Baroda: Maharaja Sayajirao University, 1962).

2

David E. Sopher, "Indian Pastoral Castes and Livestock Ecologies: A Geographic Analysis," in *Pastoralists and Nomads in South Asia*, ed. L.S Leshnik and G.D. Sontheimer (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975), pp. 183-208.

3

Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer, "The Dhangars: A Nomadic Pastoral Community in a Developing Agricultural Environment," in Leshnik and Sontheimer, ed., *Pastoralists*, pp. 139-170.

4

M.S.A. Rao, *Social Movements and Social Transformations: A Study of Two Backward Classes Movements in India* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1979), I, p. 158.

5

The song of Bachau Bir (Part 3.3) is one illustration of Ahir-Thakur conflict. Planalp writes that the Ahir of Senapur "are tenants and have often acted as strong-arm men for their Thakurs. ... However, they have also on many occasions clashed with Thakurs, and an incident in the past year led to a *lāṭhī*-fight in which three or four Ahirs and an equal number of Thakurs were injured." [Jack M. Planalp, "Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village," Diss. Cornell University 1956, p. 67.] M.S.A. Rao also mentions the resistance to Yadava Movement programs by Thakurs and other high castes [*Social Movements*, pp. 141, 202, etc.].

6

A common description offered by their detractors is that Ahir men, although perhaps physically strong, are dull, slow-witted and simple, like their buffalos.

7

Letter received from Gunther Sontheimer dated October 21, 1985.

8
Günther Dietz Sontheimer, Birobā, Mhaskobā und Khandobā: Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von pastoralen Gottheiten in Mahārāṣhṭra (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976).

9
G.A. Deleury, The Cult of Viṭhobā (Poona: Deccan College, 1960), pp. 197-8.

10
Sontheimer, "Hero and Sati-Stones of Maharashtra," in Memorial Stones: A Study of Their Origin, Significance and Variety, ed. S. Settar and Gunther D. Sontheimer (Dharwad: Institute of Indian Art History; New Delhi: South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, 1982), pp. 265-68.

11
Pandey mentions Telis, Dhobis, Noniyas, Chamars, Gaderiya, Mallah [The Hindi Oral Epic Loriki (Allahabad: Sahitya Bhawan, 1979), pp. 20, 23], Kurmi [The Hindi Oral Epic Canaini (Allahabad: Sahitya Bhawan, 1982), pp. 17,19]. Baidyanath Saraswati lists Ahirs, Manjhis, Bharabhujas, and Domas [Kashi: Myth and Reality of a Classical Tradition (Simla: Institute of Advanced Study, 1975), p. 35].

12
Letter received from Gyan Prakash, dated March 10, 1986. Prakash mentions some incidents from the Tulsi Bir epic in his paper "Terms of Servitude: Representations of Labor Bondage in Colonial India," S.S.R.C. Workshop on Agricultural Terminologies, New Orleans, January, 1986. I am grateful to Peter Claus for sending me this paper.

The following episodes in the epic of Tulsi Bir were recorded in North Indian Notes and Queries, ed. William Crooke, III, No. 1 (April 1893), entry 1:

> Mirzapur--Bhuiyas--Worship of Nadu Bir and Tulasi Bir. Once upon a time there lived in Magadha or Vihara a Bhuiya woman of exquisite loveliness. She had a son named Nadu, who surpassed his mother in beauty. He was accustomed to roam in the forest and hunt any animal that fell in his way. One day he went out a-hunting equipped with a bow and arrows. When he got into the forest he happened to see a deer, which he pursued. He chased it till nightfall with no success. As he had gone far into the forest he lost his way and was quite at a loss to know what to do and where to go. Thirsty and tired, he wandered about till he reached

fortunately the kuti or hermitage of an inspired ascetic, Koela Rishi by name. Seeing the ascetic he bowed down to the earth before him and begged for water, of which he stood badly in want. Koela Rishi took pity on him, and calling his wife and daughter, told them to give him what he wanted. The daughter, in obedience to her father´s bidding, brought out a gourd full of water, and her mother gave him fruits and roots, and quenched his thirst with water. He passed the night there. But since he saw the daughter of the ascetic he was so much enamoured of her beauty that he became beside himself. In the morning he got up and went to take leave of the ascetic to go home. But the ascetic saw through his mental eyes that the Bhuiya was enamoured of his daughter´s beauty, and also that his daughter was in love with him. He consulted his wife on the subject, and with her permission he married his daughter to the Bhuiya. Nadu with his sweetheart returned to his mother, who was named Kamala. Kamala was exceedingly glad to see the wife of her son so beautiful and good. Nadu loved his wife so much that he could never bear to leave her. For a long time they lived together, but the union was unhappily not blessed with a child. Discouraged and disheartened, Nadu ran away from home without giving any notice to his wife or mother. After many days´ journey he reached Kamaru Kamachcha. One day as he was taking a walk in the streets of the city, the eyes of the daughter of the king of that city fell on him. She invited Nadu to dinner and made love to him. Her name was Naina Jogini. After some time she began to dread that some other king´s daughter would appropriate her lover. To avoid this she turned Nadu during the day into an ox through her magical powers, and at night changed him into a man and lived with him. In this way some days were passed. After some time Nadu remembered his wife and home. and begged Naina to allow him to visit his native land. Naina at first refused permission, but at last finding that Nadu could not live long unless he was given leave, she granted him leave for a fortnight, and caused him through her magical powers to reach home within a couple of hours. He met his wife, stayed with her, and she became in child. Nadu, true to his promise, left home and reached Kamaru Kamachcha on the fixed day. But when he left home he wrote his address on the gate of the door. He also told his

wife that the child, when born, would search him out. In nine months Kausalya was delivered of a child most beautiful, and he was named Tulasi Bir. Tulasi Bir was so powerful, even on the day of his birth, that when he saw the light he at once proceeded to the fields and brought to the house a very heavy log that was lying there to be burnt in the saur, or room in which his mother was secluded. At the age of 5 he made a gulli of lead, 25 mauds in weight, and a danda, 52 mauds in weight, of iron. With these he used to play tipcat. When he attained his 7th year he read the writing on the gate, and having come to know that his father was a prisoner in Kamaru Kamachcha, in the hands of Naina Jogini, he flew into a passion and started immediately for Kamaru Kamachcha. Reaching there, he commenced fighting with the forces of Naina Jogini. He set fire to the fort, and it was in a moment turned into a heap of ashes. The whole army was killed, driven back or burnt by Tulasi Bir. Naina used all her magical powers to defeat Tulasi, but in vain. Tulasi rescued his father and brought him home.

Another bold adventure of Tulasi and Nadu is described: In the city of Marang there lived two brothers, Ganga Ram and Gajadhar. They had a sister, Barij Somati by name, who was very beautiful, and for whose love many men from distant quarters fought with her brothers, were defeated, and returned home heart-broken. When Tulasi was informed of it he fell in love with her without seeing her. He started for Marang, taking leave of his mother and father. He first sent word to Ganga Ram and Gajadhar to give their sister to him in marriage. But they payed no attention to the message. Tulasi then fought a duel with the two brothers, defeated them, and took their sister by force, and brought her home, and married her. Lahang Bir was born of Barij Somati. He was a very powerful man. Bhuiyas still speak of his boldness and bravery in very high terms, and worship him with prayers and sacrifices after every two years outside the village or in the family kitchen. They worship him in this way. They dig a hole in the ground 5 or 6 cubits deep and 1 or 2 cubits long. They burn fire in it and walk on it bare foot. They say that the man who is possessed of the Bir does not feel any sensation of burning by walking

on fire. They also scatter thorny branches of ber and kankor on the ground, and roll therein. They say that the thorns become blunt when a man possessed of Lahang Bir rolls on them. Those who are possessed of the Bir pronounce blessings on the Bhuiyas, and they believe that these blessings turn out true. Bhuiyas offer him sacrifices of goats, fowls and hogs. This account of a very popular race of heroes, who are worshipped among the Bhuiyas of South Mirzapur, was collected by Pandit Ram Gharib Chaube at a meeting of Bhuiyas collected for ethnological enquiry at Dudhi.

The elusive tribe called the Savaras are also reported to worship Birs. Alexander Cunningham devotees an entire chapter to the worship of Birs and other gram devata in his "Report of a Tour in the Central Provinces and Lower Gangetic Doab in 1881-82," Archaeological Survey of India, XVII, 139-166.

13 See William Waterfield, The Lay of Alha (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).

14 See Stuart Blackburn, "Oral Performance: Narrative and Ritual in a Tamil Folk Tradition," Journal of American Folklore 94 (1981), 207-27; Peter Claus, "The Siri Myth and Ritual: A Mass Possession Cult of South India," Ethnology 14, No. 1 (January 1975), 47-58, etc.

15 While the Ahir are known to participate in the worship of many of the classes of deified dead discussed in this thesis, including Birs, Brahms, and Ghazi Miyan and the Panchon Pir (Pandey, Canainī, p. 21, note 4), it is my impression from my contact with Banaras Gwal Ahirs that they are primarily Goddess worshippers. They cite Durga, Bansatti, Sitala, and other local goddesses as important Ahir deities, the first two figuring prominently in the Loriki-Chanaini epic. Vaudeville cites "pastoral folk" to be primarily Shaivite and Goddess worshippers [Charlotte Vaudeville, "The Govardhan Myth in North India," Indo-Iranian Journal, 22 (1980), p. 1]. Sontheimer records in many places the connection between pastoral gods and the popular manifestations of Shiva in Maharashtra [Birobā, pp. 87, 165, etc.]. He says that "the identification with Siva or rather its popular forms (Bhairav, Mahadev, Mhaskoba, Siddha) has been caused by peripatetic Saivites (Naths, Gosavis) ... [who] were often the first to penetrate the

pastoral and forested areas." [Personal correspondence, Oct. 21, 1985]. Shiva makes important appearances in the Loriki, but I have no independent data on Ahir worship this deity, and noticed no consistent association between the Bir Babas and Shiva. In spite of the similarity in appearance between the _liṅga_ and the aniconic images of many Birs, there was never any confusion (or corresponding attempts to identify the two deities) between them. The connection of the Ahir with Krishna has been mentioned several times in this work. It seems that pastoralists came under the sway of Vaishnavism at a later date, through the identification of local deities--like Govardhan--with the cowherd Krishna. (Vaudeville, "Govardhan.")

APPENDIX 1

Agahan	agahan
Aharaura	aharaurā
Ahir	ahīr
Ahira Bir	ahīrā bīr
Allah	allāh
Amina Sati	aminā satī
Apsara	apsarā
Ashvin	āśvin
Baba	bābā
Bachau Bir	bacāū bīr
Bahadur	bahādur
Banaras	banāras
Bechu Bir	becū bīr
Belawa Bir	belawā bīr
Bhagat	bhagat
Bhagwan	bhagwān
Bhairav/a	bhairav/a
Bhar	bhar
Bhavani	bhavānī
Bhumihar	bhumihār
Bhumiya	bhumiyā
Bhut/a	bhūt/a
Bir	bīr
Brahm	brahm
Bhoju Bir	bhojū bīr
Brahma	brahma
Chainpur	cainpur
Chait Ganj	cait gañj
Chaitra	caitra
Chamar	camār
Chaura	caurā
Chhatariya Bir	chatariyā
Chhathi	chaṭhī
Dafali	ḍafālī
Daitra Bir	daitrā bīr
Dasanami Naga	dasanāmī nāga
Devi	devī
Deva	deva
Devata	devatā
Dhangar	dhangar
Dhobi	dhobī

Dih	ḍīh
Diha	ḍīhā
Dihwar	ḍīhwār/ḍīwār
Dihwarin	ḍihwārin
Diwali	diwālī
Dom	ḍom
Dulha Deo	dulhā deo
Durga	durgā
Dyorhiya Bir	ḍyoṛhiyā bīr
Ekadashi	ekādaśī
Gaderiya/Gareriya	gaḍeriyā/gaṛeriyā
Ganesh/a	gaṇeś/a
Ganga	gaṅgā
Gandharva	gandharva
Gavli	gavḷī
Gaya	gāyā
Ghazi Miyan	ġāzī mīyā̃
Ghazipur	ġāzīpur
Gomati	gomatī
Gond	goṇḍ
Gopala	gopālā
Gopi	gopī
Guhyaka	guhyaka
Guni	guṇī
Gwal/Gual	gwāl/guāl
Hanuman	hanumān
Harashu	ḣaraṣū/harasū
Holi	holī
Jaunpur	jaunpur
Jeth	jeṭh
Jinn	jinn
Jogi Bir	jogī bīr
Kal Bhairav/a	kāl bhairav/a
Kali	kālī
Kalu Bir	kālū bīr
Kamarup Kamakhya	kāmarūp kāmākhyā
Kankara Bir	kaṅkarā bīr
Kapardi	kapardī
Kapardisha	kapardīśa
Kapildhara	kapildhārā
Karma Kandi	karma kāṇḍī
Karman Bir	karman bīr
Kartik/a	kārtik/a
Kashi	kāśī

Kedariya Bir	keḍāriyā/keṛāriyā bīr
Khatik	khāṭik
Kol	kol
Kolhua Bir	kolhuā bīr
Krishna	kṛṣṇa
Krishnaut/Kisnaut	kṛṣṇaut/kisnaut
Kshatriya	kṣatriya
Kumhar	kumhār
Kunbi	kunbī
Lahura Bir	lahurā bīr
Mallah	mallāh
Mali	Mālī
Manjhi	manjhī
Mangalaha Bir	mangalahā bīr
Mantra	mantra
Marayal	marāyal
Mari	marī
Mashan/Masan	maśān/masān
Mata	mātā
Mela	melā
Mirzapur	mirzāpur
Mujawar	mujāwar
Mur Kata Baba	mūṛ kaṭā bābā
Naga	nāga
Nangan Bir	nangan bīr
Narayanpur	nārāyaṇpur
Naruwa Bir	naruwā bīr
Nat	naṭ
Nath	nāth
Nav Ratra	nav rātra
Nona Chamain/Chamarin	nonā camāin/camārin
Ojha	ojhā
Panchami	pancamī
Panchapiriya	pāncapīriyā
Panchon Pir	pā̃cõ pīr
Panda	panḍā
Pasi	pāsī
Penaru Bir	penārū bīr
Phalgun	phālgun
Pipala Bir	pīpalā bīr
Pir	pīr
Pisach/Pishacha	pisāc/piśāca
Pishach/a Mochan/a	piśāc/a mocan/a
Pith/a	pīṭh/a

Pitr Paksh	pitṛ pakṣ
Pota Raju	pota rāju
Pujari	pujārī
Rai Das	raī dās
Raja	rājā
Rajbhar	rājbhar
Rajput	rājput
Rakshas/a	rākṣas/a
Rang Bhari Ekadashi	rang bharī ekādasī
Ravi Das	ravi dās
Rudra	rudra
Sadhu	sādhu
Sayar/Saiyar/i Mai	sāyar/saiyar/ī māī
Sambho Mai	sambho māī
Santoshi Mata	santoṣī mātā
Satami	sātamī
Sati	satī
Shahid	śahīd
Shakta	śākta
Shiv Ratri	śiv rātra
Shiva	śiva
Shraddh/a	śrāddh/a
Shravan	srāvaṇ/a
Shudra	śūdra
Siha Bir	sīhā bīr
Sir Karhiya	sīr karhīyā
Sita	sītā
Sitala Mata	sītalā Mātā
Sokha	sokhā
Stupa	stūpa
Tar Bir	tāṛ bīr
Teli	telī
Thakur	ṭhākur
Tirth	tīrth
Tripindi	tripiṇḍī
Varanasi	vārāṇasī
Vira	vīra
Virabhadra	vīrabhadra
Vishnu	viṣṇu
Vishveshvara	viśveśvara
Yadav	yādav
Yaksha	yakṣa
Yogi	yogī

APPENDIX 2

manohar bīr

aaaeeeeee
more rāma ho rām ...

phalaka pe sitāre mubārak hai dete
aphtāb candā se seharā pukāre
jamīdārī āyal salāmī kare
āsman ke phariste badan ko sanwāre
jisko cāhe ū parbat se rāī kare
wakt āye to rāī se parbat banāwe
mandir masjid but khānāō̃ mulla pujārī devatāō̃ ke
gun̤ ko hameśā o gāve

muhābata karne wālo ne yahī andāz hai rakhā ki
muhābata ho hi jātī hai [1]
(muhābata ho hi jātī hai - REPEAT)
bhalai au burai pe kisi ka hai nahi parada to
sikāyata ho hi jātī hai
(sikāyata ho hi jātī hai - REPEAT)
bhalā kīje bhalā hogā
burā kīje burā hogā
bhalāī au burāī pe, kisī kā imtahā̃ hogā
umra bhara
kaidi ban mālī khudā ke pās jāte haĩ
to jamānata ho hi jātī hai
(jamānat ho hi jātī hai - REPEAT)

chatkāyā suraj hans ke rosanī
ambar khilā gagan mẽ man hi man muskāyā
chatkāyā suraj hans ke rosanī
(ambar khilā ... chatkāyā ... REPEAT)

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1 The repetitions of the backup singers are written in parentheses.

kitanā koī tarīph kare
us jwān kisān yasokat kī
kitanī ālī ratan bīrtā
kiyā des mẽ soharat kī
kalā pradarsit kavī kartā
us jwān kisān yasokat kī
kurmī ḍīh kā rahane wālā
gāyā jilā mẽ unnat kī

jekare māyā se thīkal dharatī gaganawā̃
jekare māyā se holā sānjhā bihān
jekare māyā se khile patte tale phulawā
jekare māyā se ugay sūrūja au cānd
jekare dāyā hotī wo to itarātā
(jekare dāyā hotī wo to itarātā - REPEAT)
jekare dāyā hotī wo to itarātā
anharaṇī ke ānkh dete, bahiraṇī ke kān

o sunā sunā bhaiya gāyā jilā kai kahānī
(sunā sunā ... REPEAT)
sunā sunā bhaiyā gāyā jilā kai kahānī
bhaĩsa hamārā kahawa kaile desawā mẽ tuphān
dinawā mẽ rahā jangal jhāriyā mẽ chipa ke
rātiyā ke bhaĩsa ghūme lagāwe gaõwe
sūtal cārapāī jone manahi kā pāwe
(sūtal ... REPEAT)
sūtal cārapāī jone manahi kā pāwe
ekā hī dabaule un kā le levā parān
ekā hī hafte mẽ terah khūn kar ḍālā
gāyā jilā dhīs tab garam bhe kān
arḍar diyā bhaĩse ko golī se māra ṣālo
(arḍar ... REPEAT)
arḍar diyā bhaĩse ko golī se māra ṣālo
bhaĩsa hamārā kahawa kaile desawā mẽ tuphān
yādab the manohar donõ ankhiyā kā gāyab
mausamī phagunawā̃ gayālā niyarāy
laṭhī le ke yādab khetawā̃ hī kara gaile
(laṭhī le ke ... REPEAT)
laṭhī le ke yādab khetawā̃ hī kara gaile
rehele kā bagiyā mẽ thoṛā maidān
(rehele ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] bhaĩsa kā kām rahal ki din bhar jangal mẽ rahale/ rāt mẽ bhaĩsa gaõ mẽ rahal jae, aur jī ādmī ke cārpaī ulaṭke, matlab prān le lī/ yādab jī khetawāī kare dine ...

kaĩcī rahī ḍāl kī us par baithe pao laṭka ke
kahī̃ se ghumat āyā bhaĩsā cāṭ paõ harasā ke

chatkāyā suraj hans ke rosanī
hansane lage manohar ṭhanḍā unhẽ janāyā
chatkāyā suraj hans ke rosanī
    (o hansane lage monohar ... chatkāyā ... REPEAT)

cāṭata cāṭata paõwe, sūrajī kā bhaĩsā
sing se ṭhukūca diyā mār
sūre bhūsiyāle, rahī rahī kicikicāle
kahe jāde majāk ho bekār
agar tohe pakaṛ ham paibe
sārā majāk bhulawāibe
torī bhusiyā choṛāibe
agar ham nīce āibe, agar ham nīce āibe
    (agar ham ... REPEAT)
kabhī cāṭe bhaĩsa, kabhī thukca lagāwe
anharā bhusiyā ke gālī barasāwe
derī na lagāibe, jaldī se āibe
to hamau ke sūr banāibe
agar ham nīce āibe, agar ham nīce āibe
    (agar ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] lekin wo bhaĩsa jab nahĩ mānā, tab manohar kah rahe haĩ ki ...

sun-sun re sāle, jarā hos sambhāle
kāhẽ par gaile anharā ke pāle
derī na lagāibe, jaldī se āibe
torī bhusiyā re choṛāibe
agar ham nīce āibe, agar ham nīce āibe
    (agar ... REPEAT)

    aaaeeee
    dhanya re samāīya prabal hoi gaile
    dhanya hamāre desawā ke bīr ho jawān
    rām hanumān ḍolā ehī dharatī pe
    karaṇa dhananjay aise bīr ho sujān

goṛawā kā ghāwāya anharā se na sahāyā
    (goṛawā kā ... REPEAT)
goṛawā kā ghāwāya anharā se na sahāyā
kūda paṛā peṛe par se ṭaigiyā pasār
bīce garadanawā kūdal bhaĩsa ke
lāṭhī ḍanḍa le ke gaõ puravā lai dhāve
    (lāṭhī ... REPEAT)
lāṭhī ḍanḍa le ke gaõ puravā lai dhāve
khetanan ke bhūlal gharawa ka ho duwār
subaha kā dhāval dupahar hoi gaile
sām kā pahairiyā gaile niyarāy

dhīmī bhai cal bhaĩsā phaĩcā kul girāve
(dhīmī ... REPEAT)
dhīmī bhai cāl bhaĩsā phaĩcā kul girāve
tab kahe manohar nahī̃ chūtī hātawa hamāre
gherale ke bagiyā mẽ kantedār tarawā
(gherale ... REPEAT)
gherale ke bagiyā mẽ kantedār tarawā
phans karke bhaĩsā giral bhaharāy
(phans ... REPEAT)
[SPOKEN] ek bagicā me bhaĩsā, ghumat-ghumat subahe kā ghāwal, dupahar, tisarpahar niyarāyagal/ ghumat-ghumat jo gir gayā bhaĩsa/ gaon wāle ikaṭṭha ho kar kahẽ, manohar chor dā! manohar antim pramār karẽ ...

goṛawā kā ghāo, tani hamake pujāwada choṛav nahī̃ sarau
badalawā cukāwadā choṛav nahī̃ sarau
(badalawā ... REPEAT TWICE)
kitanā mātā bahinin ke dhodihalā sindūrawā
jātiyā kā yādab āj milalabā te sūrawa
thāṛhe bale kehonī tu chatiyā pe lagāwedā
choṛav nahī̃ sarau
(badalawā cukāwadā ... REPEAT TWICE)
khūn phaĩkā bagiyā mẽ marī gayā bhaĩsā
choṛe na manohar uparā barasā noṭ paisā
pattu akhbarawā mẽ nām chapawāwadā
choṛav nahī̃ sarau
(badalawā ... REPEAT)

mursid pattū gawāl kahẽ
usī bāg mẽ jilā dhīs tabhī āye
bhaĩsā ke sang surejī kā photo khincawāye

chatkāyā sūraj hans ke rosanī
siu murat, mannā rāj pe hameśā dāyā
chatkāyā sūraj hans ke rosanī
(siu murat ... chatkāyā ... REPEAT)

more rāmā ho rām

bacaū bīr

aaaeeeeee
more rāma ho rām

sir karahiyā khās, hindū bisbidhālay ke pās
jahā par mālvījī kā rahī kuch jamīn
bacaū bahādur bīr kī bānī hai dostõ
sunie lājabāb kahānī hai dostõ
(sunie ... REPEAT)

rahā̃ jamīn mālvījī kā batāte haĩ
wahā̃ pe ambe sinh chatrin mẽ lagāte haĩ
usī jamīn pe ambe sinh jāke aṛ gailẽ
hatoga piche nahĩ mālvījī aṛ gailẽ

mānte mālvījī bacaū ko choṭā bhāī
kahẽ jamīn apane nām līje likhwāī
kānīgoh āye khet nepānī hai dostõ
sunie lājabāb kahānī hai dostõ
(sunie ... REPEAT)

rahī purānī bahair bacaū riddhi-siddhi se
ṭhākur māran cāhe unko buddhi se
gaṛāsā ghar par rakh ke khālī hāth jāte haĩ
nar samjhāī le lo dusmānī kī bāte hai
kahẽ bacaū maĩ āj khālī hāth jāū̃gā
maĩ bhī rahīso mẽ apnā nambar pāū̃gā
(maĩ bhī ... REPEAT)

udhar ṭhākur kī gol tūphānī hai dostõ
sunie lājabāb kahānī hai dostõ
(sunie ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] bacaū yādab kā aourat apne pati se kahaĩ ki gaṛāsā āpan le ke jā/ kahaĩ na wahā̃ pe baṛe-baṛe log āyal hauan/ ham jab khet napāway, chuche hāth/ aur udhar ṭhākur kī gol tūphānī hai dosto/ log saje the ...

gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
ghar se calā baghelā bacaū maradanawā
gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
(ghar se ... gaganawā̃ ... REPEAT)

hai kasbal riddhi-siddhi bacaū se khār purānī hai
har khāte bacaū jāte ṭhākur kī gol tuphānī hai
hogā khet napānā calke pharkatī ānkh gulāmī hai
hai ghere aṭhārah juwān balam barcha pānī hai

hai cocak aṭhārah juwān ṭhākur ke bīr baghelā
lekar phītā lage nāpane bacaū juwān akelā

gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
gurī-gurā bhailī hākim ke samanawā̃
gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
(gurī-gurā ... gaganawā̃ ... REPEAT)

babūā sinh bole tikhār ho, mat cūko jawanawā̃
chek lo bacaū ko, jāne na pāwẽ
gudarī māmā yahī bhāv batāwẽ
dinawā̃ rahal somwār ho, mat cūko jawanawā̃
(dinawā̃ ... REPEAT)

jān gaye hākim ki hoī laṛāī
bacaū se bole haĩ pās mẽ jāī
tohare pe khatarā apār ho
mat cūko jawanawā̃
(tohare ... REPEAT)
hai tānge par cale ke baiṭho calo hamāre sang
garaj ke bacaū kahẽ, āj dekhav ṭhākur ke jang

gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
kaccā phor dev mukkan se mārav janawā̃
gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
(kaccā ... gaganawā̃ ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] hākim kehẽ ki hamare ekkā par baiṭhie/ āp ihā̃ se nikal jāie/ lekin bacaū jawān kahẽ ki nā, mukkā se māri ke bhagā dev ham aṭharahõ jawānan ke ...

lehale hathiyār, gol jutal ṭhākuran ke
(lehale hathiyār ... REPEAT)
oṭho ke le tālā jawanawā̃ ho khete par jāye
lāṭhī gaṛāsā bhālan rahale camkāye
moche par dele gurelā bacaū ko dekhāye
āj baji khete pe, dehale lalakār gol jutal ṭhākuran ke
(dehale lalakār ... REPEAT)
o dang se bacaū bole ho, mat karā gumān
tohare bāp ke maralī, toharo jāi jān
riddhi-siddhi mat phūlā, hoi bans kā hān
lāṭhī mẽ hamare barasa, jaise angār gol jutal
ṭhākuran ke
(jaise angār ... REPEAT)
yathamtāy gai gol wahā̃ par bacaū bīr na bhāge
ādhī ghantā ke ṭāīm ṭhākur se bacaū māge

gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
cahe lāṭhī de dā bhīṛ ke maidanawā̃
gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
(cahe ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] jab jawān log ghare liye tab bacaū kahẽ, ek lāṭhī hamke āp de dīgie, tab tak jawān log ek dam ghare lehanan ...

aaaeeee
o deriyā na kailẽ babuā ṭhākur ke jawanawā̃
bacaū par ṭuṭe sab juwān ararāy
aour san-san lauriyā cale ho jab lāgalal
jhimmal yādab choṛī ke calal parāy
o nikale aginiya lāṭhī chinke lahale bacaū
(nikale ... REPEAT)
pañc bigahā mārī ke jab ḍihale bhagāye
calale jawanawā̃ bhawanawā̃ ke apane
agawā bisbidhyālayawā̃ pare gaile tār
phā̃sī gaile gorawā baghelā giri gailẽ
(phā̃sī ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] akele nau jawān aṭharahõ jawān ke mārke jab pañc bighā bhagā dehalan/ socalan ki ab parāy ke nikal jāī ghare/ āge bisbidhyālay mẽ, tār kantawālā gheral rahal/ pair phans gayal, gir paral/

peṛ girā hai jaise juwān waise bacaū gire utān
lāṭhī gaṛasā barsan lāgā
(lāṭhī ... REPEAT TWICE)
lāṭhī gaṛasā barsan lāgā
tahar nikalke gudariyā māmā
eke jiyat jin chore jawān
kahe jiyat rahī to bin-bin mārī
(jiyat ... REPEAT)
jiyat rahī to bin-bin mārī
doī lāṭhī māre utān
doī lāṭhī mare utān
(doī lāṭhī ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] gudarī māmā, bacaū kā māmā lajat rahalan, u kahẽ agar āj jindā bacaū nikal jaihaĩ, tā ī aṭharahaũ jane ke jindā na choṛī haĩ/ aj inhai khatam kar da/ marle par dū lāṭhī gudarī māmā marlan/

tab bhelūpur thāne par lās bacaū kā gaī uṭhāī
bīc rāste mẽ bacaū ne bīr gati ko pāyī

gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
lasiyā cirghare me bhejawāye chanawā̃
gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
(lasiyā ... gaganawā̃ ... REPEAT)

aaaeeee
lās ke sāthe ahīraniyā̃ cali bhaile na
(lās ke sathe ... REPEAT)
caudah pauā bacaū bīr rahā kalejā ojan
ek bhaĩs ka piye dūdh aur tīn pao kā bhojan
sun-sun bahai nayan se paniyā calī bhaile na
(sun-sun ... REPEAT TWICE ...
aaaaaeeeeee calī bhaile na o cali bhaile na ...
sun-sun ... REPEAT TWICE)
yādab kule mẽ eke ek se hue bīr ranabankā̃
yādo guru bihārī pahale bajā gaye hai ḍanka
sankā pattu ke bhajaniyā̃ calī bhaile na
(sankā ... REPEAT)
bacaū bīr kā maral suni ke dukhī banāras-kāsī
jajj sāhab ne diye phaĩsalā, riddhi-siddhi ko phā̃sī

gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
yādo rām sakal kahate durai nayanawā̃
gaganawā̃ mẽ chāī badarī
(yādo ... gaganawā̃ ... REPEAT)

more rāma ho rām

becū bīr

aaeeeeee
more rāma ho rām

bīrõ kī gāthā rangdār jis mẽ rangā huā sansār
pujāte kaljug mẽ banke saccā bhagwān
jilā mirjāpur kā ek dāstān yād āyā
jahā̃ yaduvansiyõ ne rang kā nūr hai jhalkāyā
jikat hai purānī anjuman rang lāyegī
śrī srotāõ ke nas-nas me cubh jāyegī

khās jhalahiyā nadī ke tat pe rahā papihatā grām
rahe laṛāku baccan yādav khūb thā un kā nām

kyā kahate māsāallā dhan takdīr āp kī
jī cāhatā hai khīnc lū̃ tasvīr āp kī
(jī cāhatā hai ... REPEAT)

bāl kāle kāle, ajab the ghū̃gharāle
māth candā jyoti, nain hīrā motī
lāṭhī dāī ser kā jawā̃ lagātā thā
biābān ke andar gaū carātā thā
yahī thā roj kā wākiyā, kabhī nā ḍartā thā
bhale insān kā nāhar se jor kartā thā
nit jangal mẽ o gāye bhī lagāte the
apane bhī pīte o ser ko pilāte the
(apane bhī pite ... REPEAT)

jis mā̃ ke odra mẽ bidhanā race sarīr āp kī
jī cāhatā hai khīnc lū̃ tasvīr āp kī
(jī cāhatā hai ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] baccan yādav ka yahī kām rahal ki jangal mẽ gaiyā carāvẽ aur ḍelī ser se laṛai/ ek roj ser se laṛke jab baccan yādav kā gaunā bhayal aurat ke pās gailan, khā̃c lagal dekh ke pūch baithlī/ kahẽ ki ham ser se laṛīlā/ kahaī jā, ser ke pachār ke aib/ tab ham suhāg kī rāt bitāib/ itanī bā baccan yādav sun kar ghar se cal diye, aur phir aurat kahrahī hai ki ...

nāhar sange dagawā jin kamaihā hamare pīyawā
serawõ ke dūdhawā piaihā hamare pīyawā
(serawõ ke dūdhawā ... REPEAT)
o jone din pachārī debā, baṛh jāihaī izzatiyā ho
wohī din bitāibe suhāg wālī ratiyā ho

o serawõ ke dūdhawā piaihā hamare pīyawā
(serawõ ke dūdhawā ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] ab baccan yādav ghar se cal diye ...

itane mẽ bidhanā kai kalamiyā̃ ḍolī gaile
bhārī bhayalabā ahīre ke abhimān
o ihe ho samaiyā bābū lorik par paṛalī
gaiyā berhal gaili ho pipariya darbhyān
neurāpur kā lohawā gajab kar dihale
sādā dharmī kā calī gaile ho parān
o baṛe baṛe bīrawā bābū aile dharatī pe
(baṛe baṛe ... REPEAT)
lekin samayā sabahī ke kailebā hairān
o ehai re samaiyā bacan yādav par paṛalī
serawā se laṛe bade calalai jawān
o nadī o jhalahiyā ke bīc rahiyā mẽ
(nadī o jhalahiyā ... REPEAT)
nadī o jhalahiyā ke bīc rahiyā mẽ
dekhā ekā bhālūā milal sīnā tān
garjal maraganawā̃ bhiṛal bhālūā se
bhālū lehī lihale ta baccan yādav ka parān
o baccan ke maranawā̃ kā sor hoī gaile
(baccan ke maranawā̃ ... REPEAT)
ee baccan ke maranawā̃ kā sor hoī gaile
khāy ke kasamiyā calī ho dilajān
(khāy ke kasamiyā ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] baccan yādav jab ghar se cal diye, rāste mẽ bhālū mil gayal/ mār ke tāl nau jawān jab laṛ gailan bhālū se, bhālū girāi ke baccan yādav ke phāṛ dehale/ jab on ke aurat ke patā calal, ghar se kasam khāī ke callin ki jab tak bhālū ke na mārab, tab tak annpānī na khāyab/

sendurawa kai lebai badala
nidiyā harām samjhī annpānī mahurawā
sendūrawā kai lebai badalā
(nidiyā ... sendūrawā ... REPEAT)
tākat mẽ mazbūt rahī, we ghar se calī aunṭh cabāt
toku rokat gā̃o kā manai hai beṭī tu nahī̃ ḍerāt
tegā bālā liye hāth mẽ jaise ho gaī kālī tāt
to ghare ke andar pahū̃ci jahā̃ ser socai pachāt

[SPOKEN] baccan yādav ka aurat jāyke bhālū ke mār dihalin aur apane patī ke pās gailin/ idhar ser bhī soc rahā hai ki āj hamārā dost nahī̃ āyā laṛane, aur udhar se rāstā dekh ke ki baccan ke lās ke bagal mẽ baiṭh ke ser ro rahā hai/ kaise ro rahā hai ...

aaaeee
baccan kī lāsiyā pe roy rahā re ser sāthī becārā
(baccan kī lāsiya ... REPEAT)
ab kaise laṛbai ke dūdhawa pilāī
duniyā mẽ kaise karau sangatāī
sārī badaniyā ko toy rahā re ser sāthī becārā
(sārī badaniyā ko ... REPEAT)
itane mẽ baccan kī pahũcī gujariyā
dhailī sajanawā̃ ke bhar ankawariyā
ban mẽ karuna ras roy rahā re ser sāthī becārā
(ban mẽ karuna ras ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] baccan yādav ka aurat jāyke apane patī ke pakaṛ ke lai jāy ke jhalahiyā nadī ke kināre par cītā lagāya ke aur patī ke sāth jalai lagalin/

aaaeee jangal bicawā̃
utaral jannat kā sitarawā jangal bicawā̃
(utaral jannat kā sitarawā ... REPEAT)
dhanyāwād de rahā ser dhanya re dost kī rānī
badalā le lī mere dost kai, amar terī kahānī
galgai pāniyā me patharawā jangal bicawā̃
(galgai pāniyā mẽ ... REPEAT)
eee jangala bicawā̃ rāmā jangal bicawā̃
galgai pāniyā mẽ patharawā jangal bicawā̃
(galgai pāniyā mẽ ... REPEAT)
ser bhī jal kar bhasmā ho gayā, banī samādhi tīn
baccan nām badal karke ho gaile becū bīr
jeke jānai sansarawā jangal bicawā̃
(jeke jānai ... REPEAT)

[SPOKEN] hā̃ ... ser jab bhī jal gaye, baccan kā nām badal ke becū rakhāyal aur ser ka nām bīr/ becū bīr nām se kis roj pūjā holā ...

kārtik ekādasī ke uhawā̃ lagatā bhārī melā
koī choṛāwe bhūt jālā, koī howe bade gadelā
pīte caurī pe kaparawā jangal bicawā̃
(pīte caurī pe ... REPEAT)

mursid pattu gwāl kahaī dastān yahī se rūkā
sarayū gwāl yu pī mẽ jānat nām sabhī becū kā
sendūrawā kā lebe badalā
siu mūrat mannā rāj ke likhaya ke sahūrawā
sendūrawā ke lebe badalā

more rāma ho rām

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